**SKEMA 4: SPECIALEAFLEVERING**  
Institut for Æstetiske Fag

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SUMMARY
INTRODUCTION
The death of Marion Crane

A pretty young woman is driving in her car on a Californian highway. In her purse is the $40,000 she has stolen from her employer's office back in Phoenix, Arizona; somewhere behind her is a suspicious cop following her trail; in front of her only darkness, heavy rain and the blinding headlights of the oncoming cars. So, when she catches a glimpse of a sign reading 'Bates Motel, Vacancy' she makes the fatal decision to stay the night.

The woman, Marion Crane (Janet Leigh), meets the motel manager, the friendly although slightly defensive and odd Norman Bates (Anthony Perkins), who invites her for dinner in his house. However, after having rewrapped the stolen money in a newspaper, Marion overhears a quarrel between Norman and his old mother, who is not prepared to have "strange young girls for supper". In the end, Norman brings the supper to his office, where he and Marion eat it together, surrounded by his stuffed birds.

Tired after an exhausting day, Marion withdraws to her room and gets ready for bed. Little does she know that Norman is watching her through a hole in the office wall as she changes into a bathrobe. Afterwards, she makes a written note; an account of the stolen money, which she has decided to return. She tears the note into pieces, flushes it down the toilet, and heads for the shower [see DVD excerpt].

Thus begins the most infamous shower scene in film history: as Marion washes with pleasurable movements, a shadow slowly closes in on her behind the semi-transparent shower curtain. Suddenly, the curtain is pulled aside and a tall womanish figure stabs Marion repeatedly with a knife. The figure disappears, and Marion slides down the wall, grabbing on to the shower curtain with what power she has remaining, before falling dead over the edge of the tub.

Alfred Hitchcock's Psycho (1960) would prove to become a classic, and the shower scene one of the most famous and inspiring scenes in film history.

Although the actual murder scene lasts only about 45 seconds, it consists of a
vast number of shots. The close framing avoids any 'offensive' parts of the female anatomy and suggests the violence rather than explicating it. This technique triggered the audience's imagination, bestowing the film with a shocking suggestive impact, emphasized by Bernard Hermann's shrieking violins. The effect exceeded what most audiences had ever seen before, which led a contemporary critic to state that "Psycho is surely the sickest film ever made" (Callenbach, 1960:48).

The shocking impact, however, was not only a result of the scene's audio-visual style. To a large extent, it was the result of Psycho's narrative construction, luring the audience astray with false clues and varying genres.

In the opening scene, a camera pans above the skyline of Phoenix, Arizona, gradually zooming in on a building before cutting to a blinded window, and finally to the hotel room beyond the window. With this gradual movement in through the window, Hitchcock seems to mime the voyeuristic pleasure of film watching and make us aware that what we are about to witness is mere spectacle, not 'real'. Inside the hotel room, Marion and her boyfriend Sam (John Gavin) are discussing their problematic relationship: Sam pays alimony to his ex-wife, and due to their financial situation they cannot afford to get married. Despite the warning that 'this is just film', the scene calls for empathy: soft violin music, dramatic dialogue, classic Hollywood-style editing.

After having said goodbye to Sam, who is headed for California, Marion returns to her office job. Here, the film switches genre to comedy, as Tom Cassidy (Frank Albertson), a clearly tipsy nouveau riche hillbilly ("Lowerie, I'm dying of thristaroone") arrives to settle down on Marion's desk, entertaining her with 50 cent wisdom and flaunting the $40,000 towards a house for his daughter's wedding. "I declare!" exclaims Marion's goofy colleague at the sight of the money. "I don't – that's how I get to keep it", Cassidy replies. Weighed down by a headache and the $40,000 that she has been trusted to take to the bank, Marion excuses herself and leaves work.

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1 More than 70 different shots (Thomsen, 1990:218).
2 It has always been part of the film's mythology that Janet Leigh stood naked in the shower during an entire week of filming. However, in his book The Girl in Alfred Hitchcock's Shower: A Murder That Became a Real-Life Mystery, a Mystery That Became an Obsession (2010), author Robert Graysmith claims that all shots that do not show Leigh's face are actually of Marli Renfro – a model who was Leigh's body double during the production.
At home, while changing her clothes, Marion gradually gets tempted by the money lying on her bed – money that could secure her future with Sam. As she looks thoughtfully at the money, the film switches genre once again; the slightly ominous music affirming the crime thriller ambience. Marion 'forgets' to deposit the money, instead heading off for California and Sam. Her trip encompasses classical crime thriller moments: when she encounters her mystified boss at a pedestrian crossing, when she is interrogated by a cop after having fallen asleep in her car, and when she swaps her car with the curious cop still keeping a close eye on her.

When Marion finally arrives at Bates' Motel the genre changes to psycho-drama, as Marion is let in on Norman's problematic relationship with his mother. By this time, the contemporary audience, who had no clue what was going to happen, must have been almost dizzy from the constant genre shifts. They may have expected that the next twist would be a love triangle drama between Marion, Sam and Norman. However, the one thing they could not predict was the sudden switch to pure horror that the bathroom murder caused: "Here the death of Janet Leigh, normally a happy star, is carefully not prepared, and defies all standard dramatic protocol since Aristotle. It proclaims a state of chaos, especially rare in American entertainment then" (Durgnat, 2002:111).

The death of Marion Crane, the only possible protagonist and object of identification for the first 45 minutes of the film, pulled the rug completely from under the audience's feet, leaving them in complete bewilderment. The best alternative was the peculiar Norman Bates, leaving the audience reluctantly emphasising with his attempts to get rid of the evidence: holding their breath when Marion's car refused to sink into the swamp, and breathing a sigh of relief when it finally did.

Actually, the sly screenplay had planted some clues to predict Marion's destiny and reveal the identity of the killer. After all, Marion's last name is Crane – a bird's name, hinting at the stuffed birds in Norman's office. And Norman's first name implies his split personality: he is neither woman nor man.
Psycho

This year Psycho celebrates its 50th anniversary, resulting in increased interest and press coverage, special DVD releases etc. However, it has never really been forgotten during the last 50 years, continually celebrated by film critics and enthusiasts, and scrutinised by film theorists.

Psycho was based on Robert Bloch's 1959 novel of the same name, which investigated the authentic case of the 'Wisconsin-killer' Ed Gein, who was arrested in 1957 for the murder of two women. Gein reportedly kept his mother's corpse in his house, along with various body parts of his other victims. (Schubart, 2001:105)

Hitchcock bought the rights to the novel for $9,000, and – rumour has it – all available copies, to prevent people from revealing the ending. The film became one of the first noticeable examples of what would later become known as exploitation: inexpensive, sensational films with a clearly defined segment and every intention of making money. Financed by Hitchcock personally, the production budget was about $800,000, which – even for that time – was remarkably low, and its gross revenue was reportedly about $32,000,000 in the United States alone.3

Psycho was also an early example of smart and excessive marketing. In order to increase public interest, Hitchcock insisted that the film could not be seen by the critics until its opening. And, unprecedented at the time, moviegoers were prohibited from entering the cinema after the film had started. Moreover, everyone who had seen it was strongly urged not to reveal the film's narrative twists and ending (Durgnat, 2002). The film's success with the audience was not mirrored in most reviews; the film's reputation as groundbreaking innovation is mainly a case of retrospective appreciation:

Although it had a mixed reception from the critics when it first appeared, Psycho is now universally accepted as a classic of the modern film. Its radical way with narrative, in which audience manipulation is more important than character empathy, represented a major shift from the complacent conventions of plot-orientated popular cinema. Its grim portrait of family

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3 www.imdb.com/title/tt0054215/business+box+office+data+psycho&cd=1&hl=da&ct=clnk&gl=dk
relationships and sexual abnormality influenced American horror movies for the next generation. (Sinyard, 1994:115)

The production and distribution phases were challenged by various obstacles, including the aerial shots in the opening scene and the restrictive film censorship\(^4\). The limited filming space in the bathroom scene was another significant challenge. However, Hitchcock and his director of photography, John L. Russell, reversed it into an advantage, creating lots of close up and medium close up shots that were subsequently tied together by film editor George Tomasini in artistic montage style. With its remarkable stylistic craftsmanship, as demonstrated in the shower scene, *Psycho* contributed to rehabilitate 'questionable' genres, demonstrating that they were far more than just special effects and cheap thrills. In fact, as the bathroom scene showed, through the hands of an auteur like Hitchcock, they could turn into art.

**Before Psycho**

In the years that followed *Psycho*’s success, 'realist' horror gained influence and popularity, targeting family values in modern America. The bathroom scene became so influential that it has hardly been possible to make a bathroom scene ever since, without at least hinting an intertextual reference to the 'mother'.\(^5\) Intertextuality, however, is obviously not a one-way street from *Psycho* and forward – Hitchcock himself was inspired by others.

One of Hitchcock's main sources of inspiration was the French director Henri-Georges Clouzot. In Clouzot's film *Les Diaboliques* from 1955 there is not only one, but two bathroom murders (although one of them faked). Based on Pierre Boileau and Thomas Narcejac's thriller novel *Celle Qui N'etait Pas* (1952) the film is about a man who apparently becomes the victim of a murderous plot conjured up in collaboration between his wife and his mistress. After they have drowned him in a bathtub (so we are to believe), the body mysteriously disappears. At the end of the film the wife finds

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\(^4\) *Psycho* was not subjected to the harshest degree of censorship, though, because it was produced independently.

\(^5\) Carol Clover, who is particularly involved in the slasher sub-genre, writes: "The spiritual debt of all the post-1974 slasher films to Psycho is clear, and it is a rare example that does not pay a visual tribute, however brief, to the ancestor – if not in a shower stabbing, then in a purling drain or the shadow of a knife-wielding hand" (Clover, 1987:184).
the missing body in the tub, and as it slowly sits up she suffers a seizure and dies – which turns out to be the husband and his mistress' ultimate plan [see DVD excerpt].

According to some sources, Hitchcock showed interest in buying the rights to the novel Celle Qui N'était Pas, but was beaten to it by Clouzot. Regardless of whether or not this is true, Hitchcock greatly admired Clouzot's work and was inspired by it when he made Psycho. In addition to the thematic similarities, there are strong visual links. As pointed out by David Shipman: "The shot of the deceived wife […], slumping lifelessly to the bathroom floor after suffering her fatal heart attack is quite similar to the image of Janet Leigh's final repose after being slain in Psycho" (McCarthy (ed.), 1994:52).

A popular anecdote tells about a concerned father who sent a letter to Hitchcock, complaining that his daughter refused to have a bath after having seen Les Diaboliques, and now she would not go in the shower either, after having seen Psycho. Hitchcock reportedly wrote a note back reading: "Send her to the dry cleaners".

One other film in particular was an obvious visual inspiration for Psycho's famous shower scene: Mark Robson's The Seventh Victim (1943), a thriller/horror film about a woman (Kim Hunter) who, during the search for her lost sister in New York, discovers a satanic cult. While showering she is intimidated by an old lady, whose silhouette behind the shower curtain (fig. 1) forms a clear predecessor to the approaching shadow of 'Mrs. Bates' in Psycho.
**Bathroom scenes**

In modern society the bathroom is considered almost a sanctuary, reserved for personal rituals and certain bodily functions that few wish to share with others. In most homes the bathroom is the only room that has a key, further defining it as a secluded space for privacy and discretion. Bathing or showering is a vulnerable situation that involves nudity, privacy and closed eyes. This makes the situation perfectly suited for merging some of horror film's main themes: on the one hand pleasure and voyeurism, on the other hand terror and repulsion. The horror bathroom is never safe, which illustrates another cardinal horror trait: the constant threat of evil.

In Wes Craven's *A Nightmare on Elm Street* (1984) evil is an ever-present reality, as the monstrous Freddy Krueger (Robert Englund) haunts teenagers in their sleep. In one scene the terrorised Nancy (Heather Langenkamp) makes the blunder of falling asleep in a bathtub, and in an instant Freddy's claw-hand literally emerges from the water, reminding us that evil never sleeps (fig. 2).

Given their general connotations to cleanliness and sterility, as well as the fact that they are often depicted with shiny white surfaces, bathrooms make all the more shocking backdrops for bloodshed. This is optimally exploited in *Psycho's* black and white pictures, where Marion's convincing blood, mixing with the water in the bathtub, is actually chocolate sauce.

Other features of the bathroom that often play important roles in the mise-en-scène are steam and mirrors. Steam adds an atmosphere of mystery, as it functions as a 'smokescreen', distorting the characters' (and the audience's) orientation in the room. Visual orientation is further distorted by mirrors that create illusions, drawing on the audience's confusion of which plane is 'real' and which is the mirror plane. Thus, intruders may appear with shocking suddenness and attack from unexpected
directions. Mirrors in horror film are constant reminders that something or someone may be lurking just behind the characters' backs.  

A common trait shared by the majority of horrific bathroom scenes is that they have a clear gender-based definition of roles. Females are designated as victims, and males as perpetrators of various types – from psychopathic killers to ogling sociopaths. The films rarely deviate from this definition of roles, although there are occasional male victims and – even rarer – female perpetrators. However, even when men are somehow endangered in the bathroom, they are never subjected to the nature and degree of exploitation that women are: one that merges voyeuristic body fetishism with sadistic pleasure. The image of a showering or bathing woman abundantly explores the idea of woman as victim: naked, vulnerable – and desirable.

**Bathing and showering in Western culture**

Considering its social and cultural connotations, it is far from surprising that the bathroom has evolved into one of horror's favourite places. Water itself, as well as the act of bathing, is heavily laden with connotations that can be traced back throughout the history of Western civilisation. In his book *Clean and Decent* (1960) Lawrence Wright delves into *The Fascinating History of the Bathroom and the W.C.*

Among the many interesting facts about bathing is that the notion of the daily bath for the sake of keeping clean is of fairly recent origin: "The Greek or Roman bath was only incidentally a cleaning process. Sanitas meant health, not the removal of dirt" (Wright, 1960:2). For long periods of time, bathing was chiefly seen as a prescribed treatment for sickness, or as a religious ritual. The ritualistic element of bathing and showering is often mirrored in horror films; the lingering preparations by the unknowing, designated victim seem to anticipate her impending encounter with terror or death.

With the rise of Christianity, bathing became the subject of spirited discussions and great ambivalence. Baptism created the idea of water as a means of washing away

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6 Moreover, the mirror may signify the return of the repressed in the form of the *Doppelgänger*; one of Freud's examples of 'the Uncanny'. The repressed 'double' in horror film usually symbolises the disturbed psychological state of a character: split personality or schizophrenia.
'original sin'. Yet, theologians quarrelled for centuries about whether or not it was the will of God that man should bathe. The core of the disagreement was the question of whether bathing was a sign of purity, and thus a necessity to please the church (and God); or if, on the contrary, it was a self-indulgent luxury, leading people astray from the path of faith.⁷

Quite surprisingly, the conflicting moral notions of bathing appear quite unchanged in many approaches to the bath and shower in modern horror films. Some readings of *Psycho*, for instance, interpret Marion's shower as a moral cleansing ritual after having decided to return the stolen $40,000⁸ (however, these interpretations tend to overlook the irony in the far more prosaic metaphor that she has literally flushed the evidence down the toilet moments before). Other readings also stress the moral implications, though denying the purifying aspects of Marion's shower at the expense of the idea of self-indulgence. Barbara Creed even detects a direct causal connection between Marion's pleasure and the murder: "‘Mrs. Bates’ appears without warning, just at the moment when Marion is most enjoying the sensual pleasures of her body" (Creed, 1993:149).

Whereas bathing and showering have a long and complex cultural history, the connotations in modern social life are far less ambiguous. In 1850 Doctor John Bell of Philadelphia formulated a "Treatise on Baths" in which he interestingly combined the formerly opposed bodily purposes versus morals, as discussed by theologians half a millennium earlier, stating that if bathing "were once to become more general, it would contribute powerfully towards an increase of the public health, and of individual comfort and pleasure. It would be a step in the advance from physical to moral amelioration and progress" (Wright, 1960:164). However, many years should pass before it became commonplace for Americans to shower or bathe in their homes. In 1960, when *Psycho* premiered, bathrooms were considered symptoms of a highly civilised culture, which is why the uncivilised bloodshed added to the shocking nature

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⁷ Although St. Francis of Assisi celebrated "our Sister Water, very serviceable and humble and precious and clean" (Wright, 1960:24), he still listed dirtiness among the insignia of holiness, and in the early years of the Christian church it appears to have been quite prestigious to be dirty: "St. Agnes died unwashed at the age of thirteen, and a fourth-century Christian pilgrim to Jerusalem boasted that she had not washed her face for eighteen years for fear of removing the holy chrism of baptism" (Wright, 1960:24). Others, among them Gregory the Great, recommended bathing, as long as it did not become "time-wasting luxury" (ibid.).

of the murder: "The shower scene blasphemes against a modern American religion: fresh hygiene, bodily health, sensuous happiness, ever-renewable innocence" (Durgnat, 2002:111).

Like bathing and showering, water itself holds highly ambivalent symbolic connotations. On one hand, water is a basic requirement for the existence of life, and thus often used as a symbol of life, birth and renewal – as in one of the best known pieces of pictorial art in Western culture: Botticelli's "The Birth of Venus". On the other hand, water has always been a source of mystery and anxiety, feared for its destructive powers and deceptive undercurrents. A strong destructive image in Western cultural history is that of divine punishment, deriving from the tale of the flood in the Old Testament.9

Water, as a given factor in any bathroom scene, triggers instinctive notions of life and death, birth and destruction that lie deeply embedded in us. The idea of water also possesses psychoanalytic connotations, e.g. in the interpretation of dreams where the surface-depth quality of water may symbolise the Freudian personality model, dividing the human consciousness into a conscious layer that is immediately accessible, and a subconscious layer to which there is no direct connection.10 The uncanny events in many horrific bathroom scenes seem to be linked to the resurfacing of repressed fears or desires.11

**Structure, films and theory**

Representations of women in horrific bathroom scenes may seem a slightly peculiar and rather limited focus for a thesis. But actually, one of the things that triggered my interest in the subject was that it is almost unlimited: after *Psycho*, bathrooms became one of horror film's preferred scenarios, and there is an abundance of scenes to be investigated.

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9 Like many Old Testament stories, the story of the flood in Genesis (Ch. 6-9) was based on older sources; hence, one can argue that a fear of water's destructive powers is a basic human condition.

10 Between these two layers of consciousness, Freud mentions a 'buffer zone' – the preconscious – to which we can gain access if we focus intensely.

11 The symbolism of water in most Western horror films differs from that in East Asian horror, where water mainly symbolises the spirits of the dead, ever-present among the living. Recent years have witnessed an East Asian horror boom, resulting in a vast number of productions, many of which are both stylistically elegant and truly horrific. The connection between water and dead spirits is central in Hideo Nakata's highly influential Japanese ghost films *Ring* (*Ringu*, 1998) and *Dark Water* (*Honogurai mizu no soko kara*, 2002).
When it comes to theoretical reflections, however, it is a very different story. Throughout my research I have not come across any book or article that investigates and compares different bathroom scenes and their audiovisual and interpretative potentials. Such investigations seem to be terra incognita.

In my close readings and interpretations, I have chosen to focus on American films in the 'realist' tradition. Realist horror became particularly popular in the United States after *Psycho*, encompassing main characters that are human and themes that orbit around social issues, and cultural norms and institutions: familial, societal, religious, educational and political. This selection criterion enables me to focus on the depiction of women, female sexuality and relationship between the sexes. Most of the films fall into the category of horror, even though other genres will be mentioned. A few bathroom scenes are taken from thrillers, such as *Fatal Attraction* (Adrian Lyne, 1987), but leave nothing to be desired in terms of shock and horror.\(^{12}\)

Given that the bathroom scene in *Psycho* is arguably the mother of horrific bathroom scenes, I have chosen to use it as a natural point of departure, as well as a continuous *Leitmotif*. *Psycho* had heavy influence on the emergence of 'realist' horror; a farewell to Gothic-romantic supernatural horror at the expense of 'everyday' plots with human monsters and social issues, such as core family values, gender and sexuality.

The clear link between horror and society that was established with realist horror paved the way for ideologically based critique of the films and, with the rise of feminist theory and women's rights organisations, horror films routinely became targets of critique for their 'patriarchal' values. Except for pornography, no film genre has been criticised as harshly as horror for its representations of women: pursued, tortured and killed in graphic detail for sheer entertainment. The alleged misogyny of filmic horrors will be a main issue of discussion. The question is, if horror film really thrives on hatred and contempt of women, or if there are alternative interpretations.

\(^{12}\) I will not engage in a lengthy discussion of genres and the distinctions between horror and thriller. Horror in itself is a highly heterogeneous genre label that encompasses vast varieties of sub-genres. However, the difference between thrillers and 'physical horror' (splatter, slasher etc.) has much to do with audience expectation as I see it. As thrillers generally aim at suspense, their tactics are to *deviate* from audience expectations, creating plot twists and surprises that cause insecurity of what will happen next. Physical horror, on the other hand, *confirms* — or even better — exceeds the audience's expectations of mutilation and death. The question is not what is going to happen, but *how* and *when* it happens.
and explanations to the phenomenon that horror prefers its women naked, wet and dead.

The main body of the text consists of two parts: 'Part I – History, Genre, Style' and 'Part II – Feminist and Psychoanalytic Approaches'.

In Part I, I will sketch the landscape of filmic horrors, beginning with a historical overview of some of the most important developments in horror film history. I will consider the historical development of the horror genre in connection with – and in the light of – socio-political history. Then I will move on to a genre-orientated examination of the generic traits that constitute horror, as well as a discussion of the function of horror. Finally, I will narrow in on the depiction of females, focusing particularly on the affirmations and deviations of the horror genre's tradition for female victims.

In Part II, I will engage with feminist and psychoanalytic film theory, starting with the history of psychoanalytic theory, including the theories of Freud, Lacan and Kristeva. By using concrete film examples I will discuss psychoanalytic views on film. Discussions will include the horror film's attitude towards female sexuality, gradually narrowing the focus to the psychosexual implications of spectatorship. Finally, I will make an assessment of psychoanalytic theory and its usability for film studies in general and horror film in particular.

In the conclusion, I will draw the threads together, elaborate on my views on feminist-psychoanalytic film theory, and finally reach back to eighteenth-century art philosophy to propose an alternative access point to filmic horror.

It is my conviction that horrific bathroom scenes are privileged access points to discussing filmic horrors. Their mixture of attractive women and atrocious violence are the wet dream of any horror fan, but a cold bucket of water in the faces of many feminists. Bathroom scenes effectively exploit the paradoxical essentials of horror, bordering between pleasure and pain.
PART I

HISTORY, GENRE, STYLE
On style and aesthetics

Throughout the text, I will analyse various bathroom scenes: some of them from a specific angle in order to illustrate central points, others more exhaustively to examine the theories and interpretations made by others, as well as propose some of my own. In the more detailed analyses, I will put a strong emphasis on the audio-visual aspects because, in my opinion, it is of utmost importance that films be approached on their own given terms: as narratives made up of sound and moving images. Feminist-psychoanalytic and ideology-orientated analyses often end up focussing solely on 'content', becoming so engulfed in characterisations and interpretations of plot and characters that they completely miss out on the equally important stylistic aspects: filming, editing, mise-en-scène, sound design, music, etc.

Paying close attention to stylistic devices is an important part of analysing and interpreting film. Perhaps even more so in dealing with suspense and horror films, as they are so highly dependent on images and – at least in recent times – sound in order to affect the audience. Many approaches to horror, for instance, do not pay any interest to sound. However, watching the bathroom scene in Psycho without the sound of Bernard Hermann's haunting violins will prove the essentials of sound. Also, the genre-specific sudden shock effects are highly dependant on sound in order to startle the audience.

Focussing on aesthetics is not only about judgment of what is aesthetically pleasing (a judgment which, when we talk about horror film, is opposite to the traditional idea of 'beauty': its criteria are the 'aesthetics of repulsion or terror'). The aesthetic focus also refers back to the Greek origin of the word, aesthesis: something experienced through use of the senses. Activating emotive and sensory responses is the primary artistic goal of filmic horrors. This can explain why the characters in Hitchcock's films often tend to be 'cardboard cut-outs' rather than believable humans, and why plots like Psycho's lean towards ridicule of its psychological themes rather than serious investigation: "I'm more interested in the technique of story telling by
means of film rather than what the film contains”, Hitchcock once said in an interview (Gottlieb, 2003:45).\textsuperscript{13}

Horror and aesthetics are closely linked; the spectacle and the induced affects are often indistinguishable; there is no clear borderline between the beautiful and the repulsive, the pleasurable and the horrific:

The murder is filmed with a brutality probably more menacing than ever seen before in film history. However, the truly unsettling thing is that the viewer is simultaneously subjected to a deeply satisfying aesthetic experience. The scene is not only packed with terror; it is also triumphant. (Thomsen, 1990:218, my translation)

**A brief history of early horror film**

The history of horrific film making began with the French pioneer Georges Méliès. His very first fiction films had the titles *Une Nuit Terrible* (1896), *Le Manoir de Diable* (1896) and *Le Cauchemar* (1896). They were short features (one to one and a half minutes long), more stunning and amusing than actually horrifying. Being a magician, Méliès was, from the outset, mainly interested in film as an advanced means of performing tricks and illusions. Another French filmmaker, Alice Guy – the world's first female director – made a series of short horror films based on Victor Hugo's *Notre-Dame de Paris* (*The Hunchback of Notre-Dame*, 1831); the first one called *Esmeralda* (1905).

In 1910 in the United States, J. Searle Dawley made *Frankenstein*, the first adaptation of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein; or, the Modern Prometheus* (1818), a sixteen minutes long film that would become the first in an almost infinite series of adaptations throughout the history of horror film.

German film makers were among the first to make feature length horror film, successfully employing highly stylised expressionism. Among the most famous films in this tradition are Wegener/Galeen's *Der Golem, wie er in der Welt kam* (1920), Robert Wiene's *Das Kabinet des Dr. Caligari* (1920) and F.W. Murnau's *Nosferatu, eine Symphonie des Grauens* (1922). These productions were characterised by

\textsuperscript{13} Interview by Ian Cameron and V.F. Perkins, first printed in *Movie*, No. 6, January 1963: pp. 4-6).
distorted sets, expressive acting, heavy make up and low-key lighting that created
dramatic contrasts between shadow and light. The plots were in the Gothic-romantic
tradition, full of mystery and supernatural events. Fritz Lang's M (1931), an early
sound film, was made in the same visual tradition, but deviated thematically by
depicting the misdeeds and subsequent vigilante conviction of a child murderer.
Although it was thematically closer to everyday events than most horror films of its
time, M is still far from the almost too-real horrors of modern film. Its mise-en-scène
and – in particular – Peter Lorre's acting as the murderer have strong theatrical
elements.

From the beginning of the thirties, the production of horror films gradually
increased in the United States, and American horror became dominant on the world
market. Gothic and romantic figures were still the preferred characters; the year 1931
witnessed Tod Browning's famous adaptation of Bram Stoker's Dracula (1897) with
Bela Lugosi as the bloodthirsty count, Rouben Mamoulian's version of R.L.
Stevenson's Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde (1886), and James Whale's version of
Frankenstein with Boris Karloff as the monster. Women were, on the whole, depicted
as young innocent victims, but inventive additions to the old classics sometimes
resulted in more direct relations between women and monsters, like in James Whale's
Bride of Frankenstein (1935) and Lambert Hillyer's Dracula's Daughter (1936).
Horror films that were not inhabited by Gothic monsters featured fabled creatures:
mummies, werewolves, zombies – or freaks of nature like King Kong
(Cooper/Schoedsack, 1933). These themes remained dominant throughout the thirties
and forties. With the breakout of the Second World War they even found new,
peculiar applications as in Steve Sekely's Revenge of the Zombies (1943); a film about
a mad scientist who is a former zombie-army creator for Nazi Germany.

After the war, however, the popularity of horror film decreased drastically. Rick
Worland interprets this development as a result of the socio-political circumstances.
In light of the real horrors the world had experienced: the holocaust; the nuclear
bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki; and the deaths of more than fifty million
people, there was no need for horror fiction. The genre, however, had not been
completely abandoned, but its new medium was mainly science fiction. According to
Worland, this indicated alternative connections between fiction and reality, and science fiction films from that period have largely been interpreted as cold war allegories:

That science fiction became a viable Hollywood genre for the first time in the midst of the cold war hardly seems coincidental considering its two major themes in the 1950s: invasion of Earth (that is, the United States) by aggressive, often technologically superior aliens; and the pervasive dread of atomic weapons, typically imagined as a revolt of nature in which irradiated monsters ravage entire cities. (Worland, 2007: 77)

Christian Nyby's *The Thing from another World* (1951), Byron Haskin's *The War of the Worlds* (1953) and Don Siegel's *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1956) all share these thematic traits. In Siegel's film, the aliens are a parasitical life form that invade people but leave them physically unchanged. However, they lose their capability to feel. The way they are changed into cold robots has been interpreted as a warning (although it is not clear whether it was meant in earnest or parody) about the consequences of communism – designed for the United States in the aftermath of Senator Joseph McCarthy. In Japan, science fiction also allegorised the nuclear threat but, unlike in the United States, this threat was more than just a theoretical possibility, Ishirô Honda's *Godzilla* (1954) was as only one among many films to explore the consequences of nuclear radiation.

During the latter half of the fifties, traditional horror film slowly came back into business. This was mainly due to the British Hammer Film Productions, whose famous Hammer Horrors began with Val Guest's *The Quatermass Experiment* (1955), but mostly thrived on classical Gothic horror. The United States saw a boom of horror films targeted at teenagers, including Gene Fowler's *I was a Teenage Werewolf* (1957) and Herbert L. Strock's *I was a Teenage Frankenstein* (1957).

Parallel with the re-emergence of classical horror, however, there were early signs of a new development in which "psychosexual themes would grow increasingly common" (Worland, 2007:75). This development was largely initiated by two films, both from 1960: Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho* and Michael Powell's *Peeping Tom*. 
Horror film after 1960

In 1960 two British filmmakers, one on each side of the Atlantic, directed kindred films that would come to change the outline of filmic horrors. In the United States, Alfred Hitchcock, who was best known for thriller and suspense films, made his low budget horror film *Psycho*. Little did he know that it would become the biggest commercial success in his entire career, as well as the main source of what Steven J. Schneider refers to as "'realist' horror cinema in the United States – a tradition popularized by Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho* (1960) in which the impossible, supernatural monsters of earlier films were replaced by antagonists of an apparently (or at least loosely) human ontology" (Burfoot/Lord (ed.), 2006:237).

In Hitchcock's native Britain, Michael Powell directed *Peeping Tom*; a film about a young man, Mark Lewis (Karlheinz Böhm), who captures and kills female prostitutes with a vicious device built into a camera, enabling him to film them in their dying moment. Unlike *Psycho*, Powell's film did not become a success; on the contrary, it was characterized as perverted and banned in the UK. Powell defended himself, stating that the film merely reflected the emotional corruption of modernity, but his words had little impact, and his career was ruined (Schubart, 2001:101).

The new 'realist' tendencies spurred by Hitchcock and Powell were not only a farewell to supernatural monsters; just as importantly, it was a farewell to the traditional settings of the Gothic tales: old damp castles, gloomy cellars, and the untamed forces of nature. In this respect, *Psycho* is particularly interesting because it represents a transitional phase rather than a full-blown modern horror film. Whether this is the result of a deliberate interplay with genres, or because the film still literally has to 'let go' of the remaining Gothic conventions, is open for discussion. The contrast between the old and the new is embodied in the contrast between the modern motel and the big old gloomy house of the Bates 'family'. The architecture forms a symbolic, as well as visual juxtaposition: "Hitchcock foreshadows the impending collision of characters and genres by contrasting the low, horizontal line of the motel with the dark, vertical form of the Victorian house on the hill behind it" (Worland, 2007:86). Where the motel signals modernity with its small, convenient rooms and tiled bathrooms, the Bates mansion contains the features of the Gothic castle:
creaking doors and staircases, looming shadows, and a cellar containing a shocking secret – the mummified corpse of Mrs. Bates.

Although directed by an Englishman, *Psycho* is an unmistakable product of the modern United States. The locations were a modern city (Phoenix, Arizona), a motel, and a white-tiled bathroom – recognisable settings that brought horror closer to everyday life. And Norman Bates made a new and more realistic type of monster, "not a supernatural entity but an awkward young man with a sexual hang-up" (Short, 2006:49).

Apart from its clever marketing and artistic qualities, *Psycho* owed part of its success to circumstances that allowed its depictions of violence and sexuality to cross borders, which had seldom been crossed before: the weakening of restrictive censorship under the Motion Picture Production Code, Hitchcock's high status, and the fact that the film was produced independently.

However, censorship was still rather restrictive until the instigation of the MPAA film rating system in 1968. Based on age restrictions, it secured adult audiences' right to watch more graphic violence and sexual content in films. The decrease in censorship was fully exploited the same year in George A. Romero's *Night of the Living Dead*, with vivid depictions of a rampaging army of flesh eating zombies. 1968 was also the year of release for Roman Polanski's haunting *Rosemary's Baby*. The film took the concept 'domestic horror' to a new level, completely destabilising the idea of the nuclear family. During most of the film we are left in doubt of whether we are to believe Rosemary's worldview: is she really the victim of a satanic cult that wants her to give birth to the Devil's child, or is her anxiety the result of a paranoid-depressive state caused by her pregnancy? Even thought the film in the end proves to be truly occult, its portrait of an unhappy pregnant woman was a blow to the idea of childbirth and family building as the source of unquestionable bliss.

In the years to come, warped families would become the dominant source of film horrors. Relations between parents and children were depicted as troublesome, due to external factors such as divorce or social maladjustment. Social issues were the core of the conflicts, although they were often symbolised with paranormal spectacle,
as in William Friedkin's *The Exorcist* (1973), Brian De Palma's *Carrie* (1976) and Richard Donner's *The Omen* (1976). In these films children were curses rather than blessings; John Carpenter's *Halloween* (1978) taking things to the extreme with Michael Myers, a psychotic six-year-old who murders his own sister.

Families were also threatened by external enemies. Often these threats were distorted mirror images of ideal families, like the degenerated social outcasts in Tobe Hooper's *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* (1974) and Wes Craven's *The Hills Have Eyes* (1977).

From the beginning of the seventies, as horror grew increasingly gory and realistic looking, the representation of women changed drastically. Even though female characters in the Gothic-romantic horror tradition were usually portrayed as victims, they had never been victimised so harshly and graphically. The development made horror films political issues, increasingly criticised among the growing feminist fractions. Women's rights organisations were often seen protesting in front of cinemas that showed particularly offensive films. One of those, Wes Craven's *The Last House on the Left* (1972), vividly depicted the rape, torture and murder of two teenage girls by a gang of convicts. The film's second part that showed the girls' parents taking a merciless revenge on the perpetrators, gave rise to a highly specialised and rather bizarre subgenre, the 'rape and revenge' film, which found its purest form in Meir Zarchi's *Day of the Woman* (1978, re-released as *I Spit on Your Grave*). Here, the avenging Jennifer (Camille Keaton) gets back at one of her rapists by literalising the Freudian myth: castrating him in a bathtub.

The fetishlike depiction of violence against women was continued in the slasher genre; its universal template formulated with *Halloween* and repeated in countless successors – most famously Sean S. Cunningham's *Friday the 13th* (1980). Slasher films were not only criticised for sympathising with the killer and depicting women as worthless victims\(^\text{14}\); the fact that the murdered women were apparently punished for being sexually active was interpreted as a denigration of female sexuality. Feminist

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\(^{14}\) Except for the final girl, as Carol Clover has called the sole surviving girl who became a generic trademark. I will return to this.
film critic Cynthia Freeland, however, defends the horror genre, claiming that much more generalised issues are at play than female sexuality:

Some people assume that the horror genre is antiwoman – and, to be sure, women have always been targets of monsters, from vampires to slasher killers. I will argue, however, that in their reflection of evil, horror films often question the traditional values and gender roles associated with patriarchal institutions such as religion, science, the law, and the nuclear family. (Freeland, 2000:4)

In general, the slasher genre has been seen in light of the socio-political climate of the period in which it bloomed; its underlying moral codex interpreted as a symptom of the new conservative and puritan tendencies that peaked under Ronald Reagan's reign.


The United States' dominance in the field of horror film, which had remained relatively unchallenged since *Psycho* 's success, ended by the close of the nineties. Films like Hideo Nakata's *Ringu* (1998) kick started the East Asian horror boom, which not only spread out from Japan to other Asian countries, but launched a worldwide wave of 'neo-Gothic' occult horror films like Sam Raimi's *The Gift* (2000), Alejandro Amenábar's *The Others* (2001), Juan Antonia Bayona's *El Orfanato* (2007) and Hans Fabian Wullenweber's *Cecilie* (2007): a clearly Asian-inspired Danish ghost film with classic bathroom horrors.

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15 *Scream* also jumpstarted a new cycle of slasher-inspired horror films that appealed strongly to teenage audiences, including *I Know What You Did Last Summer* (Jim Gillespie, 1997) *Urban Legend* (Jamie Blanks, 1998) and *Cherry Falls* (Geoffrey Wright, 2000).
The new millennium also saw the comeback of another classic subgenre, the zombie film: In 2002, the British director Danny Boyle, made the postapocalyptic 28 Days Later; Zack Snyder remade George A. Romero's Dawn of the Dead in 2004; followed by Romero's own sequels to his original: Land of the Dead (2005), Diary of the Dead (2007) and Survival of the Dead (2010).

Parallel with the return to classical horror emerged the trend that has been coined "torture porn" (reportedly by the critic David Edelstein). Popularised by the Saw and Hostel series, they are just as stylised as German expressionism, their distant cousins from the beginning of horror feature film. However, there is nothing naïve or romantic about their all-too-real looking depictions of torture and mutilation, filmed in muddy colour schemes with stark lighting.

The function of horror
Whereas film professor Rick Worland's history of horror film mainly focuses on socio-political perspectives, the philosopher Noël Carroll chooses to focus on what he calls The Philosophy of Horror. Through investigations of generic functional characteristics, he aims at answering the big question 'Why Horror?'

Carroll offers a basic definition of horror when he writes: "The cross-art, cross-media genre of horror takes its title from the emotion it characteristically or rather ideally promotes; this emotion constitutes the identifying mark of horror" (Carroll, 1990:14). It cannot be put much simpler: horror films are films that aim at making their audience feel horrified. Carroll has coined the term 'art-horror' to describe horror evoked by fictions, as opposed to "natural horror" – the sense of horror caused by 'real' events. Art-horror relies on the audience's willingness to participate actively in the horrors proposed by the fiction; on one hand aware that the threat is not real, on the other hand acknowledging that it is threatening within the boundaries of the fictitious conventions.

18 Carroll is well known for his contributions to 'cognitive film theory'; a discipline he has cultivated with film theorists David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson.
19 For a thorough discussion of the relationship between fiction and reality, see the chapter "Fiktion er ikke fiktiv" in Morten Kyndrup's Riften og sløret – essays over kunstens betingelser (Aarhus Universitetsforlag, 1998).
According to Carroll, the threat is not only posed on the subject, but in a much wider perspective: on the reigning 'order'. With a structural manoeuvre he categorises horror fictions as narratives based on a normal/abnormal/normal scheme (Carroll, 1990:195-206). Horror films are about 'normal' societies that undergo changes under the presence of something 'abnormal' (the monster); the ultimate goal of the narrative is the expelling of the monster in order to restore our faith in society's reigning order:

The horror story can be conceptualized as a symbolic defence of a culture's standards of normality; the genre employs the abnormal, only for the purpose of showing it vanquished by the forces of the normal. The abnormal is allowed center stage solely as foil to the cultural order, which will ultimately be vindicated by the end of the fiction. (Carroll, 1990:199)

Indeed, this structure is evident in many horror narratives. Robert Zemeckis' *What Lies Beneath* (2000) is an apt example. It begins with describing the – on the surface – happily married couple Claire and Norman Spencer (Michelle Pfeiffer and Harrison Ford), who live in a beautiful house by a lake. However, Claire soon experiences several very horrific incidents in her bathroom, as she is haunted by the ghost of a young girl who, later in the film, turns out to be Norman's dead mistress. Moreover, as Claire discovers, it was Norman himself who killed her. When confronted with the evidence Norman drugs Claire and leaves her to drown in the bathtub. Miraculously, she manages to survive, and in the symbolically laden ending she dives into the lake to make peace with the past. Throughout the film water is used as a hands-on symbol for the repressed, as hinted in the sly title: there are hidden *lies* beneath the surface. Claire must confront the grave injustice of her husband and expel the monstrous (the ghost of the dead girl); only then can order be restored.  

Carroll writes about horror plots: "Anyone familiar with the genre of horror knows that its plots are very repetitive. Though here and there one may encounter a plot of striking originality, in general, horror stories seem to differ more in surface

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20 Note the several apparent allusions to *Psycho*: not only does the film contain horrific bathroom scenes; the name of the murderous husband, Norman, is the very name of the man who killed Marion Crane 40 years before in *Psycho*. 
variations than in their deep narrative structures" (Carroll, 1990:97). Indeed, many horror films make use of the normal/abnormal/normal theory; there are, however, also counter-examples that deliberately do not restore normality, but end up in "an O. Henry twist that leads straight down a mine shaft" (King, 1991:48). Carroll does not offer any sufficient explanation for these examples, except stating that they these films in their outsets are too fantastic from their outset to establish any notion of normality. Horror writer Stephen King is more willing to address these cases, interpreting them as fearfully fascinated fantasies of the resistance against order:

Monstrosity fascinates us because it appeals to the conservative Republican in a three-piece suit who resides within all of us. We love and need the concept of monstrosity because it is a reaffirmation of the order we all crave as human beings…and let me further suggest that it is not the physical or mental aberration in itself which horrifies us, but rather the lack of order which these aberrations seem to imply. (King, 1991:56)

Acknowledging the fact that we basically watch horror to renew our faith in order, King sees the absurd and non-restorative endings of many horror films as "part of the game" (King, 1991:48): sometimes the world is just absurd.

In fact, the tragic, absurd, apocalyptic endings of many horror films have even greater moral potential than those that let order be restored; surprisingly often they are allegorical tales of human stupidity and self-sufficiency.

In David Cronenberg's *The Fly* (1986), for instance, the scientist Seth Brundle (Jeff Goldblum) tries to master time and space by creating a teleporting device. Unfortunately, he ends up becoming merged with a fly and gradually turns into a repulsive creature – the 'Brundlefly'. Although his girlfriend Veronica (Geena Davis) finally puts an end to his misery, nothing is resolved in the sardonic end, as she bears Brundle's unborn offspring inside her. Apart from paving the way for a sequel, it implied a moral lesson: man should not play god or tamper with nature. In this and many other examples, the absurd ending suggests that the renunciation of order is often the morally stronger alternative to restoration.

In addition to 'art horror', Noël Carroll mentions another very central horror film characteristic (what he himself refers to as his "core theory"): the presence of a
monster. He defines the monster as something non-human – something that surpasses the boundaries of biological explanation, thus defying the laws of nature, evoking both horror and disgust. According to Carroll, fictions in which the monster is indisputably human are not horror, but should rather be considered 'tales of terror'. This ought to disqualify Psycho as horror film; however, the question leads Carroll to eagerly discuss his own definitions, concluding that "even if Norman Bates is not a monster technically speaking […] he is a powerful icon of impurity, which is, ultimately, why I submit that commentators are prone to classify Psycho as a horror film" (Carroll, 1990:39).

In the end, Carroll's own answer to his question 'Why horror' is not based on philosophy, as much as socio-political terms:

As a consequence of the Vietnam War and the parade of disillusionments that followed in its trail, Americans have recently and consciously – often for good reason – been disabused of their Dream. Understandably, commentators have traded on the suggestive verbal substantiality of the American Dream with the American Nightmare. The sense of paralysis, engendered not only by massive historical shocks, but by an unrelenting inability to come to terms with situations, which persistently seem inconceivable and unbelievable, finds a ready, though not a total, analogue in the recurrent psychic demoralization of the fictional victims left dumbfounded by horrific monsters. For better or worse, Americans have been irreparably shaken by “incredible” events and changes for nearly two decades. And horror has been their genre. (Carroll, 1990:214)

Noël Carroll's attempt to formulate a 'philosophy of horror' shows an admirable will to uncover our fascination with depictions of evil. In practice, however, Carroll's desire to make a coherent and structured philosophy is foiled by the genre's versatility and varieties of audience response.

**Torture the women**

Alfred Hitchcock had clear ideas of the means and methods that would make his films work. Female victims were an important ingredient in his recipe for success; as he expressed during the filming of The Birds (1963): "I always believe in following the
advice of the playwright Sardou. He said 'Torture the women!' The trouble today is that we don't torture women enough" (Spoto, 1983:483).

Hitchcock's regret that women were not tortured enough may have been a reaction to the film noir tradition of the forties and fifties, where the typical female lead was no longer an innocent lady, but a self-sufficient, dangerous seductress who victimised men. However, this new type of woman has, up until recently, been an exception in the history of crime and horror fiction.

The question of why women apparently make better victims than men has been the subject of many heated discussions. Feminists in particular have criticised the horror genre for being misogynistic; claiming that because the majority of horror films are made by men for men, the female victims function exclusively as objects of desire (in psychoanalytic terms: fetish-objects) or revenge (male filmmakers and audiences revenging the symbolic castration caused by their mothers). However, there are a number of unanswered questions linked to the idea that horror stigmatises the female sex and sacrifices women on the altar of male superiority. Film critic Cynthia Freeland warns, despite her self-proclaimed feminist views, against reductive feminist interpretations:

Most current feminist studies of horror films are psychodynamic. That is, though they may consider films as artefacts, recognizing such aspect as plot, narrative, or point of view, their chief emphasis is on viewers' motives and interest in watching horror films, and on the psychological effects such films have. Typically this sort of feminist film theory relies upon a psychoanalytic framework in which women are described as castrated or as representing threats evoking male castration anxiety. These theories also standardly presume some connection between gazing, violent aggression, and masculinity, and they suggest that there are particularly "male" motivations for making, watching, and enjoying horror films. (Bordwell/Carroll (ed.), 1996:195-196)

Feminist-psychoanalytic efforts to explain the attraction of horror are not only based on assumptions about human nature; they are also based on the notion that filmic horrors appeal exclusively to males. This is not only a misconception in relation to
modern horror; it is also a misconception in relation to earlier history of horrific fictions.

It is interesting to look at one of the main sources of modern horror: the Gothic novel, which flourished in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. It was particularly popular among middle class women who enjoyed the extravagant blend of spine-chilling terror and spectacular romance. Common for most of these fictions – many of them written by female authors – was that the central characters were young tormented ladies pursued by evil villains, haunted by violent forces of nature or shaken by disturbing events of supernatural origin. These damsels in distress functioned as objects of identification for the female readers, who followed their struggles with great excitement.21

Hence, the idea of the female victim is not a new invention; nor was it designed for male audiences. It is true, though, that whereas the distressed ladies in Gothic fiction most often triumphed over their enemies, women in modern horror tend to lose their lives as victims of male monsters. Perhaps this development of the genre reflects a general desensitisation in modern audiences, requiring still more extreme measures to achieve the sense of terror that the mere thought of an abandoned castle caused 200 years ago.

Another interesting aspect of this discussion is that the common feminist focus on the portrayal of women in film horrors pays little or no attention to the question: if modern horror shows misogynistic tendencies, what then shall we think of the representation of males in the same fictions? If we were to take these fictions as sincere statements about social life, is it not then a sign of misandry that the men and boys in modern horror films are most likely to be psychopathic (possibly gender-confused) killers with mother fixations? That is, if they are not just doltish, sex-obsessed sidekicks designed to deliver compulsory touches of ‘comic relief’, or destined to lose their lives in parenthetical oblivion. Even when portrayed with a hint of heroism, the male characters of modern horror seem to be cursed by the irony of destiny; like the African-American Ben (Duane Jones) in George A. Romero's Night Among the most famous examples are Ann Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1789) and Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey* (1818).
of the Living Dead (1968), who manages to survive a zombie-attack only to be killed by a bunch of white rednecks in the film's absurd ending. Or like Sam in Psycho: a sound and virile counterpart to the sickly Norman Bates, but about as exciting as a sack of potatoes.\textsuperscript{22} As a matter of fact, modern horror leaves far less leeway for male heroes than its Gothic and Romantic precursors.

Yet another consideration in respect of female victims is the aesthetics of the body. Throughout the history of art, the female body has been a favourite motif, while the male body has had its ups and downs in terms of pictorial representation. Again, feminists may argue that the continuation of this in film art and entertainment is the consequence of the male-dominated and demeaning idea that women should be indulgent objects on display. However, Raymond Durgnat argues that the alleged sadism behind the spectacle of a vulnerable, victimised woman may in fact encompass something altogether different: tenderness towards the female body: "Marion's nakedness, albeit sexual, is also the vulnerability of nakedness – and spectator tenderness towards the maternal body, first object of love to both sexes" (Durgnat, 2002: 112).

As far as horrific bathroom scenes go, it seems to be the case that the female body is preferred because of its aesthetic properties. The naked male body is rarely portrayed as an aesthetic or erotic object, and when it is, it tends to happen in a comic or distanced setting. One noticeable example is the beginning of American Psycho (Mary Harron, 2000), where Patrick Bateman (Christian Bale) goes through his morning ritual. The harmonious piano tune and the mise-en-scène add a slightly ridiculous beauty salon atmosphere to the scene, and Bateman's voice over stresses the profound irony of the scene ("In the shower I use a water activated gel cleanser. Then a honey-almond body scrub. And on the face an exfoliating gel scrub…"). This chit-chat separates the scene from most other bathroom scenes, which have no dialogue and tend towards 'primal' expressions of basic human emotions: fear, desire, compassion. With American Psycho, the (female) screenwriter and director presents us with a far more 'intellectualised' version that conveys a clear message about the

\textsuperscript{22} Hitchcock explained in an interview from 1963: "the characters in the second part were merely figures. I was concentrating more on the effect of the murder and the menace and the background of the boy/mother situation, rather than the other people" (Gottlieb, 2003: 49).
portrayed character: this is clearly the life of someone so vain and superficial that he can slaughter his fellow beings without any remorse. And so he does, without discrimination: his victims are both male and female.

**Slasher morals**

The slasher genre was defined with John Carpenter's *Halloween* in 1978, and throughout almost a decennium it was the predominant horror subgenre. Sometimes referred to as 'teenie-kill-pics', the slasher was particularly popular with the very same age group that delivered the victims. These films were mostly low-budget productions made by fairly inexperienced filmmakers; out of the hundreds that were produced only a few are remembered by anyone other than the genre's aficionados. They rely on highly stylised narratives, the acting is often amateurish and awkward, and the stereotypes are countless.

Carol Clover was probably the first academic writer to make serious investigations into the genre with her highly influential 1987 essay "Her Body, Himself: Gender in the Slasher Film". In this essay Clover pointed to a number of common traits in the films, introducing some of the terms and ideas that would become general when referring to the genre.

Clover's most famous contribution to the study of slashers is the term 'final girl'; a description for a female character who survives because of her traditionally 'masculine' attributes. This – argues Clover – makes her a fit object of identification for audiences of both sexes, engaging them in a tantalising play with both sadistic and masochistic undertones. Apart from the often gender-neutral and terse names (Stevie, Marti, Terry, Stretch, Will) the final girls share one important characteristic: their chastity. It seems to be a completely incorporated part of the genre's logic that survival is dependent on 'moral' conduct: "Killing those who seek or engage in unauthorized sex amounts to a generic imperative of the slasher film" (Clover, 1987:187).

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23 The essay is included in her 1992 book *Men, Women and Chainsaws – Gender in the Modern Horror Film*. 
The puritan undertones of the genre were apparent in *Halloween*, where the final girl, the shy bookworm Laurie\textsuperscript{24}, survives while her 'cheap' schoolmates are punished for their escapades. Slasher films have often been accused of being nothing more than neo-puritan Reagan-era warnings, expressing parental concerns with the consequences of sexual liberation – and warning the teenagers what it might lead to. The slasher genre's taste for sexually active female victims became the target of much critique among feminists, who claimed that the films tried to legalise the stigmatisation of sexually liberated women. Discussing the social impact of the slasher, Worland claims that *Halloween* is an artistically skilled film, and that its moral qualities are far less simple than often claimed:

> The careful attention to form that John Carpenter and associates brought to *Halloween* upheld the best traditions of the genre, those in which frightening images and complex, often contradictory themes do not simply disturb but also expose deep psychological and social fissures. (Worland, 2007:242)

*Halloween* generated a vast number of far less capable imitations (its own sequels included); cheaply produced exploitation trivia that more or less mechanically repeated the winning formula without any mentionable artistic or social pretensions. These descendents, claims Worland, deserve far more moral criticism than their predecessor: "Particularly in the nearly unredeemable *Friday the 13\textsuperscript{th}* series, which rapidly converted the mad butcher into the star with no moral or psychological counterweight, the slasher cycle plunged into highly questionable realms" (ibid.)

Apart from the plots and character schemes of the slasher subgenre, a certain stylistic device was a target of criticism: the point-of-view shot as a representation of the killer's vision. In the beginning of *Halloween* the technique is used to conceal the identity of the killer; through his eyes we see him pick up a mask and put it on, then pick up a knife and stab a young girl who has just had sex with her boyfriend. Only then does the film cut to show the killer – revealing that he is the victim's 6-year old brother, Michael Myers (who would become one the genre's most popular and

\textsuperscript{24}Curiously enough, Laurie is played by Jamie Lee Curtis, daughter of Janet Leigh who was Marion Crane in *Psycho*. 
persistent killers). Feminists were enraged by the point-of-view technique, arguing that it invites the audience to identify and even sympathise with the killer by literally 'putting us in his place'.

Slasher critique tends to miss out on the possibility that the films do not make moral judgements at all, but merely test or even parody social and cultural codex. Given that the genre is often seen in the light of the Neo-Conservatism and Puritanism that bloomed in the Reagan era, it is likely that the apparent 'morals' of some of these films were meant as critical comments, rather than actual lessons in respectable conduct: "Even the most formulaic of numbered sequels contained ambiguous implications: Are the clueless teens of slasher movies truly liberated or simply cast adrift by adults in a social system that no longer seems capable – or perhaps even worthy – of self-defence?" (Worland, 2007:242).

This leaves us with a question that has been the centre of much discussion, not only in regard to the slasher subgenre, but to the horror genre in general: is it possible to decide whether horror, by nature, is conservative or subversive? That is, does horror basically reaffirm deeply rooted ideas about culture and society, warning us that change in structure and morals will have grave consequences; or, does horror put these old fashioned ideas and structures on display, encouraging us to doubt and discuss them? In any case, the morals and ideology of the genre are up for discussion; the often slightly rabid feminist condemnations may be counter-balanced by a more pragmatic approach. After all, the conceptualised mixture of lust and terror would hardly be successful were the victims not young, beautiful and up for a bit of fun.

The fact that slasher films rely on highly schematic formulas, creating expectation and excitement through recognition and repetition, was fully exploited in Wes Craven's pastiche *Scream*\(^25\). In a significant scene the film geek Randy (Jamie Kennedy) proclaims the rules that must be obeyed to survive a horror movie: Rule number one: "You can never have sex". Rule number two: "You can never drink or do drugs" (an extension of number one – the "sin factor"). Rule number three: "Never,

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ever, EVER, under any circumstances, say 'I'll be right back', 'cause you won't be back."

These three simple rules comprise the 'morals' of the slasher genre: staying chaste until married, avoiding intoxication and refraining from hubris in order to avoid nemesis. The *Scary Movie* series\(^{26}\) took intertextual pranks one step further with geeky spoofs of scenes from various horror films that presupposed the audience's knowledge of every movie referred; otherwise the jokes would be wasted.\(^{27}\)

*The Prowler*

Joseph Zito's *The Prowler* (1981) is a relatively early film in the slasher tradition; it features a number of narrative and stylistic traits that are both illustrative for the genre and relevant for discussing the depiction of gender and sex.

Compared to the vast number of artistically inferior slasher films that were pumped out on the market in high speed, *The Prowler* is a relatively capable production. However, it never came into distribution by a large production company, which leaves it – in the words of Adam Rockoff – as "something of a lost classic" (Rockoff, 2002:130).

The setting is characteristic for the genre: a small American coastal town called Avalon Bay. The plot is fairly straightforward, although it starts with a prologue set in 1945, where a soldier returns home to find his sweetheart in the arms of another man at a high school prom. Unable to cope with the situation he turns into 'the prowler', and kills them by impaling them both on a pitchfork. The sensational nature of the murder, as well as the murder weapon itself, is characteristic for the genre – inventive murderers are one of its trademarks.

Thirty-five years later the high school finally obtains permission to have a prom dance again. However, when teens start getting murdered by a masked figure in World War II uniform, we know that 'the prowler' has returned.


\(^{27}\) In *Scary Movie 2*, for instance, Anna Faris performs a quite amusing parody of Michelle Pfeiffer's terrible near-by drowning in the bathtub in *What Lies Beneath*. 
In the intense bathroom scene the film's final girl Pam (Vicky Dawson) has just left her roommate Sherry (Lisa Dunsheath) in their shared dorm room [see DVD excerpt]. While Sherry is in the shower we see an unknown person ascending the stairs (casting a very Nosferatu-like shadow on the wall). Then there is a cut to the person's point of view; implying the technique used in Halloween and Friday the 13th to represent the killer's gaze. Thus, the cutback to the showering Sherry, accompanied by a loud sound and high-pitched violins, leaves us to believe that her killer is on his way. Back in point of view filming we follow the assumed killer into the bathroom, where the semi-transparent glass shower partition is swiftly pulled aside – an unmistakable nod to Psycho. A reaction shot from Sherry's perspective reveals – not the killer, but her boyfriend Carl (David Sederholm). When he implies that the two should have sex ("you know what I get when I have to wait around") Sherry teases him: "Maybe I was expecting someone else". These few sentences predict the essentials of the slasher film: transgression and subsequent punishment. The couple's major transgression is, of course, that they are about to engage in non-marital sex. However, in Sherry's apparently insignificant comment lies another important key to understanding the genre: Hubris and nemesis. In a logic resembling that of Greek tragedies, Sherry's joke about "expecting someone else" all too soon becomes reality, as the uniformed killer arrives to kill her after having stabbed the unsuspecting Carl's head from the top with a bayonet; a gruelling special effect.

Writing about male and female slasher victims, Carol Clover points out that even if they may in some films be even in numbers the deaths of the female victims tend to be much more explicit and gory, filmed in closer framings and longer sequences (Clover, 1987:199-201). Thus, Carl's murder is a bit unusual, as it is both terribly lingering and filmed in close up. Yet, it is symptomatic for the genre that the murder happens before Carl has had time to get undressed.

Nudity in horror films is almost exclusively reserved for women, and as the killer enters the bathroom, the naked Sherry, who expects Carl, laughs flirtatiously through the glass partition. This adds to the suspicion that she is being punished for her exorbitant display of sexuality, as the killer pulls the partition aside and impales her on a pitchfork. The scene savours the physical advantages of the actress, the
former playboy bunny Lisa Dunsheath, balancing on the verge of 'justified' soft core porn.

The scene ends with a highly self-conscious cut; one that is not based on a symbolic or metaphoric correlation, but rather on a metonymic relationship: the cut cuts to a literal cut – the cutting of a pink, decorated cake at the prom ball. Not only does this cut sardonically replace the 'cut' that never came in the shower murder, because the murder weapon was a pitchfork instead of *Psycho*’s knife; the cut to the cutting of the cake also implies the destruction of the romanticised teenage dream world, obliterated by the harsh realities of sexuality and violence.

**The Hitcher**

Over recent years there has been a transitional change in the representation of women in horror and thriller films. Definitions of 'male' and 'female' attributes have become less rigid, with females characters more often represented as tough survivors or sturdy heroines. Dave Meyers’ 2007 remake of *The Hitcher* is an interesting case that turns the tables on traditional gender representations while displaying overt allusions to *Psycho*.

In short, *The Hitcher* is a story about a young couple, Grace and Jim (Sophia Bush and Zachary Knighton), who pick up the hitcher John Ryder (Sean Bean) on a road trip on an American highway. Ryder turns out to be a raving psychopath who threatens Grace with a knife, and the couple have to use harsh measures to get rid of him, pushing him out of the driving car. Farther along the way they discover an entire family in a car, murdered, by the roadside. The family soon turn out to be Ryder's victims, and Grace and Jim his new prey.

In the bathroom scene [see DVD excerpt], the menaced couple arrive at a motel; the neon sign attracting them in the same way that Marion Crane was attracted to Bates' Motel. The initial inkling that the film hints to *Psycho* is reaffirmed as they gain access to a motel room and head for the shower. Three shots in the shower sequence imitate *Psycho*: a close up directly into the water spraying shower head (compare fig. 3a and 3b), a close up of blood and dirt swirling down into the drain.

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28 The original was released in 1986, directed by Robert Harmon and featuring Rutger Hauer as the relentless hitcher.
(compare fig. 4a and 4b), and a shot of Grace as she washes (compare fig. 5a and 5b). These allusions to *Psycho* thrive on our suspicion that Grace is about to be killed in the shower like Marion Crane, and as Jim leaves the shower to seek help, we anxiously expect the psychopath to emerge behind the shower curtain. However, it does *not* reveal a knife-wielding maniac, and Grace can go unharmed to bed.

A sudden cut to a TV screen showing Hitchcock's *The Birds* underlines that the famous director's shadow is looming in the background. The aggressive birds are all but subtle hints to Grace's own anxiety, and as she falls asleep on the motel bed, the psychopath is about to gain access to her room, just as the killer birds on TV invade the small town.
Grace is woken up by someone caressing her, and she assumes that it is her boyfriend. Opening her eyes she discovers a 'Hostess' brand cup cake on the night table, and with an indulgent smile she exclaims "You're making me horny" – only to realise that it is not Jim, but the killer, who caresses her. At this point in the film anyone just slightly feminist will be bursting with a full-blown interpretation of the situation: the 'hostess' cake implies the woman's position as an inviting, docile piece of equipment designed for men's pleasure; and just as it is the case in slasher films, we expect her shameless expression of desire to be the hubris that seals her destiny: another 'promiscuous' female meets her end by patriarchal society's vengeful hands. Knowing the plot from the original 1986 film will fully support the feminist nightmare vision – there, the girl was chained between a truck and a trailer to be torn apart in front of her boyfriend.

However, the film's allusions to Psycho, as well as the idea of the female as the obvious victim, are to be revealed as a smokescreen. Grace manages to escape the hitcher, and instead of finding herself tied up between a truck and a trailer she finds her boyfriend in that very situation. Eventually, the hitcher starts the engine and tears Jim in two pieces. Grace survives, and the setup in the final scene looks like a Western showdown: the young, shotgun-equipped heroine against the ultimate villain. When she points the shotgun at his face the hitcher asks her: "Feels good, doesn't it?" Her reply indicates that she has been stripped of her traditionally 'female' attributes – emotion and compassion: "I don't feel a thing".

Thus, the 2007 remake of The Hitcher presents a radical twist of the genre conventions, turning the supposed helpless female victim into an empowered, detached avenger. And drawing on our possible knowledge of the original version, as well as allusions to classical horror cinema, it cleverly confronts us with our own routine assumptions about females in film horrors.

Although not a slasher film in the traditional sense, the new version of The Hitcher produces a final girl who is more tough, resourceful and fit for survival than any final girl before her. Not only is she a survivor, she is extremely violent and shows no remorse over her actions. Carol Clover defines the final girl as a character who can only function as an object of identification for both girls and boys because she is not really a girl, but rather a boy in disguise. According to this logic, the
reversal of fortunes in *The Hitcher* (Jim getting killed, Grace surviving) is nothing more than a superficial illusion: the boy now inhabits the girl's skin and vice versa. In Clover's psychoanalytically fenced regime there is no space for deviations: males are doomed by castration anxiety, and therefore wish to punish females; females, on the other hand, have little chance of escaping the masochism forced on them by patriarchal society. This framework for understanding gender roles in horror film has been criticised for its reductionism; among others by Clover's fellow feminists Cynthia A. Freeland, who comments:

> Despite her attention to 'rezoning' of gender distinctions and to social factors in horror film plots, Clover still seems at times to fall prey to reductive generalizations or rather simplistic dichotomies and associations between viewer characteristics and stereotyped gender notions. (Bordwell/Carroll (ed.), 1996:217)

Another self-identified feminist to criticise Clover's work is Isabel Christina Pinedo, who, in her work *Recreational Terror*, investigates and discusses women's relationship with horror: "Female spectatorship of horror is a much neglected and misunderstood topic, but like other taboo pleasures before it, the pleasure women derive from watching horror films deserves to be explored" (Pinedo, 1997:69). Pinedo argues that some feminists use patriarchal order as an excuse for a kind of self-censorship that only allows women to engage in the pleasure of horror on masochistic terms – empathising with the female victims. This self-censorship is apparent in Clover's apologetic attitude towards the aggressive final girl: by resorting to violence she renounces her femininity, thus appealing to male identification. Pinedo objects against this opinion: "If a woman cannot be aggressive and still a woman, then female agency is a pipe dream. But if the surviving female can be aggressive and be really a woman, then she subverts this binary notion of gender that buttresses male dominance" (Pinedo, 1997:83).

As far as traditional feminism goes, this discussion really hits the nail on the head. Feminist theory emerged from the need to rethink rigid ideas and concepts of women, their roles and status in society as well as their emotional and sexual potentials. However, keen on diagnosing the flaws of patriarchal order, the
psychoanalytically inspired branch of early feminism ended up not only paying more attention to the male gender than the female; it also got stuck in the same old truisms that it was intended to revolutionise.  

This concludes 'Part I', which, through historical and genre-orientated discussions, has outlined the landscape of horror film and introduced the basic tools for discussing depictions of women and female sexuality. 'Part II' will focus on feminist and psychoanalytic theories and their influence on – and relevance for – film studies, while delving deeper into discussions of gender representation, female sexuality, and the impact and meaning of horrific bathroom scenes.

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29 The vaguely defined – and slightly misleading – term 'post-feminism' is sometimes applied to feminist studies that take a critical stance towards traditional feminism. Post-feminism is generally considered more inclusive than early feminism; attentive to the products of popular culture and with an expanded focus that encompasses queer studies etc.
PART II

FEMINIST AND PSYCHOANALYTIC APPROACHES
The Freudian legacy

The late sixties and the early seventies witnessed the rise of feminist theory and criticism. Initially, the discipline was practiced at European and American departments of Literature, but it soon spread out to other departments, taking on various art forms as well as social and cultural studies. In film studies, feminist theory for the most part found inspiration in psychoanalysis, believing that it offered a privileged access to discussing gender and sexuality. Psychoanalytic theory, and its claimed advantages in understanding the human mind, has been zealously questioned by other theoretic movements. 'Cognitive' film theory, for instance, regards the psychoanalytic method as assumptive: dependent on psychosexual 'givens'. In interpretations of film and audience response it becomes clear that these 'givens' replace more apparent explanations, according to 'cognitivist' Torben Grodal. Grodal's own view on film and reception is focussed on physiological and evolutionary studies, as well as social factors:

One of the reasons that psychoanalytic theories have had so much influence on film research is that psychoanalysis was seen as the only theory on the market that described emotions and sexuality. Female film researchers described a number of evident problems, such as the relationship between active and passive emotions and their relations to male and female behaviour. However, these functional relations were exclusively explained with reference to childhood experiences and imaginative but improbable theories as repression and castration. Thereby, these explanations banished the obvious and banal explanations of gender differences such as differences in anatomy (size and muscles) biologically determined differences of character (testosterone and oestrogen) and explanations based on social and cultural history. (Grodal, 2007:81, my translation)

Feminist-psychoanalytic theory is heavily inspired by the works of Sigmund Freud; and just as Freud's interest in art was not really an interest in the internal qualities of the art works, but rather how the art works reaffirmed the theories of psychoanalysis, feminist-psychoanalytic method tends towards the same reversal of logic. Tania Modleski writes about Psycho:
The response of Norman Bates (Anthony Perkins) to his "possessive" mother is to conduct his own ritual of defilement, murdering Marion Crane (Janet Leigh), meticulously cleaning the bathroom of her blood, throwing her body into the trunk of a car, and pushing it into the swamp, which slowly sucks it down. Thus do men's fears become women's fate.

(Modleski, 1988:107)

With the last sentence, Modleski proposes Norman Bates as a representative for men, thus turning a fictitious construct into universal truth.

Ever since Sigmund Freud wrote his seminal essay "Das Unheimliche" (1919) it has been a common notion that art horror and psychoanalysis are intertwined phenomena. Building his argument around a reading of E.T.A. Hoffmann's Gothic tale "Der Sandmann" (1816), Freud pointed out a number of 'uncanny' figures in literature: devices that cause terror in the reader by evoking the return of the repressed. Most of these figures are still used as common devices in horror fictions, as listed by Freud: "animism, magic and sorcery, the omnipotence of thoughts, man's attitude to death, involuntary repetition and the castration complex" (Norton, 2001:945). Freud's investigation into the uncanny could have resulted in a comprehensive instruction book of means and techniques to creating horrific art works, had he settled on an entirely empiric investigation. As it is, Freud was not really interested in the techniques of fiction writing, but rather in verifying his own psychoanalytic assertions: linking the horror evoked by fictional works directly to the infantile development of the human psyche. Thus, Freud failed to investigate Hoffmann's tale as a work of art in its own right, utilising it instead as a vehicle for his petitio principii: 'proof' that castration anxiety is the essential source of fear in the human psyche.

In modern times, Psycho's Freudian inspired plot has generated many psychoanalytic interpretations. However, they do not go unchallenged. Raymond Durgnat has a good deal of scepticism towards Freudian art analysis and interpretation: "Much Freudian theory tends to pansexualist reductionism: whatever it

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30 E.g.: Modleski 1988; Thomsen, 1990; Creed, 1993.
is gets explained by some sexual component. Hence a popular idea that the 'real' meaning of Norman's knife is that it's a phallus" (Durgnat, 2002:112).

The idea that the knife represents a phallus certainly appears to be a compulsory part of any psychoanalytic reading of Psycho. The metaphor is part of a feminist-psychoanalytic interpretation of the shower murder as a symbolic rape scene: the revenge upon woman as cunning temptress. In general, the Freudian model encompasses the well-known paroles: Oedipus complex, castration anxiety and the return of the repressed.

**Nightmare and irony**

Deeply inspired by Freud's uncanny, film theorist Robin Wood rewrote the phrase The American Dream when describing the American horror film tradition as "The American Nightmare" (Wood, 1986:70-94).\(^{31}\) Claiming that horror films are expressions repressed traumas or desires, Wood found Psycho particularly interesting because it challenged the issues of sex and gender in a time of change. The 'illicit' (non-marital) erotic relationship between Marion and Sam portrayed a modern phenomenon that could still upset a broad selection of society, while the 'transvestism' of Norman Bates suggested a threat to the traditional understanding of gender. "Sex, not money, is the root of all evil" (Wood, 1965:115) Wood polemically claims, emphasising that the fate of the stolen money becomes irrelevant after the murder of Marion.

Proving a true believer in the Freudian world view, Wood points to the repression of sexuality as the primary source of the collective American nightmares expressed through horror film. This claim certainly characterises Wood's reading of Psycho, which is not surprising given that the film overtly flaunts its exploitation of various effects from the Freudian treasury. Analysing the shower murder, Wood demonstrates his assertion that repressed sexuality is the main source of horror:

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31 Wood defines the Vietnam War as the starting point of the collective American nightmare; a war that upset the firm belief in 'good wars for good causes'. Wood interprets George A. Romero's Night of the Living Dead (1968) as an evident allegory of the Vietnam War; the ending's absurd killing of the hero incarnates the meaninglessness of the war.
Much of the film's significance is summed up in a single visual metaphor [...]: the astonishing cut from the close-up of the water and blood spiralling down the drain, to the close-up of the eye of the dead girl, with the camera spiralling outwards from it. It is as if we have emerged from the depths behind the eye, the round hole of the drain leading down into an apparently bottomless darkness, the potentialities for horror that lie in the depths of us all, and which have their source in sex, which the remainder of the film is devoted to sounding.

(Wood, 1965:121)

Although Wood presents his interpretation of the drain-eye image with great conviction, the interpretation assumes a firm belief in the Freudian model as a universal tool for understanding horror. However, popular film is never innocently unaware of its devices and techniques, horror maybe least of all: it is a 'cynical' genre with a very well-defined goal – the horrific effect. Therefore, it is naïve to think that the implantation of this or that psychoanalytical framework is an involuntary outcome of some sub-conscious wish or desire on behalf of the film or its makers. Any supposed 'Freudian slip' in horror is most likely to be all-but accidental. Hitchcock was highly aware of his filmic strategies and often presented them with a hint of humour; thus, it might make more sense to perceive the image of the transition from the eye to the blood-stained drain hole in Psycho as a visual gimmick, as well as a sardonic or even humoristic metaphor: The spark of life leaving Marion's eyes, while her life is absurdly 'flushed down the drain'.

On the whole, Psycho appears to call for a good deal of scepticism towards its own potential as a psychoanalytic case study. As proposed by Sue Short: "The sexual repression and abnormal familial relationships presented seem to parody Freudian psychoanalysis, as much as question conventional sexual mores" (Short, 2006:49). The most overt mockery appears in the final scene, where the psychiatrist Dr. Richmond (Simon Oakland), with a self-content smirk, classifies the strange case of Norman Bates/Mrs. Bates ("Transvestite? Not really…"). The whole setup, as well as the explanation itself, has an air of parody or travesty to it; it appears a redundant appendix to the film, as Simon Oakland delivers his lines with tongue-in-cheek affectation and ridiculous truisms such as: "Matricide is probably the most unbearable crime of all; especially to the son who commits it". In 1963, when asked in an
interview whether the audience was meant to take the scene seriously, Hitchcock replied: "You have to remember that *Psycho* is a film made with quite a sense of amusement on my part. To me it's a *fun* picture. […] After all it stands to reason that if one were seriously doing the *Psycho* story, it would be a case history" (Gottlieb, 2003:47).32

Hitchcock’s own words add to the idea that there is an element of ridicule put into the meticulous 'scientific' elucidation of the film's plot, stressing that this is a fiction, rather than a 'case history'. By flaunting the overtly manufactured pseudo-Freudian plot, *Psycho* partly deconstructs itself, leaving only the already half-chewed remains to those theorists whose method it is to read films on psychoanalytic terms. The ironic gesture hints that whatever 'discoveries' they may make have in fact been carefully planted there, fully visible and in no urgent need for further scrutiny.

**The return of the repressed**

Freud's 'uncanny' is based on the concept of the return of the repressed: a distorted resurfacing of something that has been hidden deep in the subconscious. Horror film has effectively utilised this concept, often translating its presupposed metaphoric notions of 'surface' and 'depth' into literal images. Thus, it is no coincidence that the deepest, darkest secret of the Bates 'family' is found in the depths of the house, the fruit cellar.33

In Adrian Lyne's *Fatal Attraction* (1987) a bathtub serves a similar purpose, however reversed: the water is used actively as a means of repression – to get rid of the unwanted. Although the film is a thriller, its bathroom scene uses classic horror style [see DVD excerpt].

The film's plot revolves around the consequences of a one-night stand that takes an unexpected turn for the family father Dan Gallagher (Michael Douglas). His bed mate Alex Forrest (Glenn Close) is not ready to call it a night, and she soon turns into a rabbit-boiling harpy who conceals a love craving and suicidal Madam Butterfly inside. In the dramatic ending she turns up in the family's bathroom just as Dan's loyal

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32 Interview by Ian Cameron and V.F. Perkins, first printed in *Movie*, no. 6 (January 1963, pp. 4-6)
33 That the cellar is specifically a *fruit* cellar also jokingly plays on the slang term 'fruit': an insane person.
wife Beth (Anne Archer) is about to have a bath. Beth's meticulous preparations are tantalising postponements, while the mirrors and heavy steam make effective visual traps that facilitate shock effects; thus, Alex suddenly appears in the mirror with a knife in her hand. Heavily loaded metaphors are used to describe the apparent danger: the water running over the edge of the tub, the boiling and whistling of a steam kettle in the kitchen.

In the menacing finale of the scene, Dan attempts to come to the rescue by drowning Alex in the tub. This image seems to encompass truly Freudian perspectives, as the no longer desired woman is literally repressed down under the surface of the water. So, when Beth finally manages to kill Alex with a gun, after Alex has "supernaturally risen from her own death by drowning" (Williams, 2005:186), we may propose that Beth’s qualities (faithfulness and emotional control) replace Alex’s qualities (sexual liberation and emotional instability). Jette Hansen approaches the film on psychoanalytic terms, and like Robin Wood she focuses on sexuality as a source of horror: "Alex's desire effectuates itself outside the laws of culture. The fatal desire is female desire; fatal specifically for the patriarchal order" (Hansen, 1991:45, my translation).

Jette Hansen's explanation implies that female sexuality is repressed in the end in order for society's 'patriarchal' structure to prevail. While the ending quite unambiguously reaffirms the idea of the nuclear family as the basis of society, there is a lack of evidence to support Hansen's idea that it simultaneously represents an overall societal fear of sexually liberated, single women. Firstly, because Alex cannot be understood as representative of women; her suicidal tendencies and obsessive behaviour imply that she is mentally ill and thus not representative at all. Secondly, it is not Alex's liberated attitude towards sex that is the problem; in fact, had she only been 'easy going' so Dan could drop after a few 'noncommittal shags', there would not have been a problem at all. The problem only occurs when Alex becomes demanding and turns out to be less liberated from traditional societal values than assumed. Her idea of a relationship turns out to be the usual one-on-one; unfortunately Dan already has a life partner which leaves Alex as the third wheel. So, when the bleeding Alex slides down the wall (in what looks like a deliberate tribute to Psycho) and back into
the tub, it puts a stop to the threat she posed on the core family and its values; but it does not put an end to female sexual liberation per se. As Linda Ruth Williams puts it: "Fatal Attraction is about the consequences of sex – as much a morality tale for the age of AIDS as a film targeting the rise of the childless career woman" (Williams, 2005:186).

Interestingly, the bathroom scene was not the film's originally filmed ending, but shot several months later to meet audience expectations (ibid.). In the original ending Alex was to commit suicide and frame Dan for murder. Although the 'noir' ending was to be softened up by Dan eventually being cleared, the audience yearned for a clear cut resolution, feeling that Alex deserved to be punished. Although portrayed with even measures of sexual aggressiveness and pathetic self destruction, Alex's 'monstrosity' lies in the latter, not the former. It is ultimately her demand for love, not for sex, that becomes her doom.

*Psycho a la Lacan*

Investigating societal and cultural power structure, feminist-psychoanalytic film critics lean towards critique of ideology, making frequent use of Jacques Lacan's 'structurally' organised psychoanalytic theories. In the case of horror film, they usually reach the conclusion that horror relies on a core of deeply rooted misogyny: the fear of the female 'other'. In Lacanian terms this alleged fear derives from the infantile psycho-sexual development where the oedipal desire towards unity with the mother conflicts with the Law of the father, demanding a split between mother and offspring. However, the female otherness not only derives from the infant's need to reject her, but also from her 'lack': the gruelling discovery that she does not possess a phallus. The mother is, in fact, castrated by nature, and as such she is a constant reminder of castration. Hence, the mother (in her imaginary shape)\(^{34}\) must be equipped with a phallus to become the 'phallic mother'. Drawing on Lacanian teachings, Raymond Bellour wrote in an essay on *Psycho*:

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\(^{34}\) Largely drawing on linguistic terms, Lacan operates with three levels of the human psyche and its development: the Symbolic, the Imaginary and the Real (*Norton*, 2001:1278-1284).
Through the incredible incorporation of a metaphor-become-reality, Norman's fascinated look carries within it that phallus immemorially attributed to the mother. But he can acknowledge it in himself only on condition that he ceaselessly encounter it in his mirror-image, namely in the body/look of woman (which engenders the mirage), and as an absolute threat to which he must respond. (Bellour, 1979:119-120)

The quote works well as an illustration of an ontological problem in psychoanalytic interpretations, as put by Cynthia Freeland: "Psychoanalytic feminist film interpretations are significantly constrained by the theoretical vocabulary and framework of psychoanalysis" (Freeland, 2000:19). Eager to reveal the profound secrets of the Bates family, Bellour treats Norman Bates as a patient in psychoanalysis and the film as a case study, incorporating Lacan's first official contribution to the terminology of psychoanalysis: the mirror stage. In the mirror stage, the infant encounters an imaginary self image that has an immediate empowering effect, because it encourages the idea of a unified self. Bellour's diagnosis of Norman Bates leads us to understand that Norman has never experienced the empowerment of identifying himself as "I", because he has never been able to reject the infantile desire to possess the mother. Hence, the imaginary unity of self in his case has become an internally struggling duality.

One of the most noticeable writers on horror over the recent years is Barbara Creed. In her book *The Monstrous Feminine* she draws mainly on the ideas of Jacques Lacan and Julia Kristeva, arguing that horror in its very foundation is a misogynistic genre, mainly concerned with the fear of the feminine principle. Commenting on Bellour's analysis of Norman Bates, Creed replies:

The notion that man fears the mother because she is the punishing, castrating parent provides us with another way of interpreting the shower-scene murder. The 'Mother' who attacks Marion in the shower is the castrating parent. [...] 'Mrs Bates' punishes/mutilates Marion for taking pleasure in her body in the shower – a punishment Mrs Bates no doubt threatened Norman with for his own illicit practices. As suggested earlier, Norman's predilection for voyeurism suggests that his

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35 Introduced during a lecture in 1936 (ibid.)
own sexual pleasures, like those of the elders who spied on Susanna, were masturbatory in nature. (Creed, 1993:148)

In the attempt to take the psychoanalysis of Norman Bates one step further, Creed draws conclusions that seem rather dubious. Firstly, the suggestion that Marion's shower involves acts that exceed the ordinary pleasure of a long-awaited shower, are not confirmed when watching the actual scene;\textsuperscript{36} even more dubious is Creed's conviction that Marion's murder is the inevitable consequence of Norman's mother prohibiting him from masturbating when he was younger (the film never mentions this detail); and finally, a seemingly redundant reference to the apocryphal Susanna\textsuperscript{37} completes an interpretation that exceeds any evidence found in the actual scene.

Apart from the fact that it is based on unsupported claims, Creed's interpretation raises a problem that concerns psychoanalysis in general. The mere idea of psychoanalysing a fictional character is clearly against the basics of psychoanalysis: a continuous interaction between therapist and patient. As she is obviously not able to direct any questions to her patient, the analyst (Creed) simply invents his past, including his masturbatory habits. But being a fiction (not a case story), Norman Bates does not even have a past outside the plot's jurisdiction; nor does he have a future – except the past and afterlife bestowed upon him by speculative sequels.\textsuperscript{38}

The horror genre is not a bewildered patient waiting to be psychoanalysed. On the contrary, horror cunningly exploits every inch of knowledge available about the human psyche – and its fears and weaknesses. This is why psychoanalytic framework and terminology in horror plots should always be regarded with a great deal of suspicion, clearly exemplified with \textit{Psycho's} oedipal spectacle. Whatever devices a horror film takes into use, the aesthetic goal is basically always the same: to horrify. As Raymond Durgnat writes: "If, and it's a big if, Mrs Norman Bates' knife is 'phallic', that's not why it sets Marion, and the spectators, screaming. Their thrills

\textsuperscript{36} However, this assumption is shared by others, including William Rothman, who even refers to the scene as "a love scene, with the shower head her imaginary partner" (Rothman, 1982:292).

\textsuperscript{37} The story of Susannah is included as chapter 13 of \textit{The Book of Daniel} in the Old Testament by both Roman Catholic and Orthodox authorities, but is omitted by both protestant and Jewish versions of the Old Testament.

\textsuperscript{38} \textit{Psycho II} (1983, Richard Donner); \textit{Psycho III} (1986, Anthony Perkins); \textit{Psycho IV: The Beginning} (1990, Mick Garris (TV movie)).
arise from the reality principle, and from conscious thought: a knife in your stomach may seriously endanger your health" (Durgnat, 2002:5).

**Julia Kristeva and the abject**

Besides the theories of Freud and Lacan, the work of Julia Kristeva – and in particular her *Powers of Horror: an Essay on Abjection* (1982) – has had a great deal of influence on feminist psychoanalytic film theory. *Powers of Horror* is built on a Freudian and Lacanian framework, emphasising the idea of the infant's ambivalent attitude towards the mother; a split between the desire for a symbiotic relationship and the need to become an independent 'I', rejecting the 'engulfing' mother. Hence, the original meaning of the word abject: cast off, rejected. The ambivalence, founded in infancy, towards everything that represents the maternal principle is, according to Kristeva, the major source of horror. Thus, female reproductive organs and the functions connected with reproduction (menstrual blood, breast milk) are considered particularly 'abject' in most cultures. Apart from her psychoanalytical predecessors, Kristeva also draws on Mary Douglas's anthropological work *Purity and Danger* (1966), a book devoted to investigating the subject of 'pollution' in various cultures and religious practices. Referring to Douglas, Kristeva defines horror as that which trespasses or blurs boundaries: defies classification or description. The 'impurity' of the abject should not be understood literally, but as a breach of cultural classification systems: "It is thus not lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite" (Kristeva, 1982:4). As a psychoanalytic concept the abject is directly connected with the infantile attitude towards the mother, who needed to be rejected in order for the infant to imagine a unified self.\(^{39}\)

Kristeva does not pay much attention to art, even less to popular culture. Nevertheless, a number of works on horror film are widely influenced by her

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\(^{39}\) The contaminating and trespassing nature of the abject, and its defiance of boundaries, appears to owe a great deal to Freud's 'return of the repressed': that which seems vaguely familiar, but is strange nevertheless. The two concepts, however, are not interchangeable.
thoughts, among them works of Barbara Creed and Katherine J. Goodnow. Shaping Kristeva's ideas into liable film theory is no easy task, and it tends to happen more on the individual writer's terms than on Kristeva's. In the introduction to her book *The Naked and the Undead* Cynthia Freeland criticises a number of her fellow feminist film theorists for being overly simplifying. Freeland is ready to sacrifice much psychoanalytic theory for a more inclusive approach: "Why must we accept or assume that all other fears can somehow equal or be reduced to fear of the primal mother? Such an assumption is unilluminating for feminist or any other purposes" (Freeland, 2000:20).

Nevertheless, just as Freud successfully listed certain motifs that actually do evoke a sense of horror, empirical experience show that what Kristeva defines as abject often is the source of fear and disgust in horror; regardless of whether or not we buy the underlying psychoanalytic explanations. One of history's most famous works of horror, Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus* (1818) is an obvious example of the 'abject' in horror long before the term was coined. Its very core concept is the trespassing of boundaries: between nature and science, God and man, life and death. The idea of creating a living being out of dead flesh is the epitome of abject; the creation's in-between state of un-deadness has been re-enacted in vast numbers of zombie films some one and a half centuries later.

One filmmaker in particular seems to have devoted his entire career to the 'abject' – at least up until five years ago: The Canadian director David Cronenberg. Long before Kristeva punned the term abject, his work cycle orbited around the human body and its frailty; in Cronenberg's work the body is no temple – rather a building site. Its boundaries are constantly challenged: infected by slug-like parasites (*Shivers*, 1975), tormented by mutating pregnancies (*The Brood*, 1979), accidentally merged with fly-genes (*The Fly*, 1986), exposed to amputation fetishism (*Crash*,

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40 In her Ph.D. dissertation from University of Bergen, *Kristeva in Focus – from Theory to Film Analysis*, Goodnow proposes the abject as a more or less universal key to the understanding of horror film: "The general concept of the abject, and the distinctions among its varieties, provide a base for asking how horror films come to evoke the feelings that they do" (Goodnow, 1994:45).

41 Curiously, Romero's groundbreaking classic *Night of the Living Dead* premiered in the year of *Frankenstein*'s 150th anniversary.

42 *A History of Violence* (2005) looked like a turning point in his career, paving the way for slightly more traditional (less bizarre) filmmaking.
1996), etc. Bodily fluids and other human discards play a central role in Cronenberg's oeuvre; it overflows with amniotic fluid and placentas, pus and discarded organs. In an arm-wrestling scene in The Fly the fly-man Seth Brundle's wrist breaks, resulting in a leak of yellowish liquid instead of blood. The image lingers in the mind long after the film ends, and the shock value is not only due to the repulsiveness of the image, but even more so to the breach of boundaries in a Kristevian sense: what comes out is not blood, which is the most important body fluid in most 'physical' horror; the main ingredient in depicting violence and death.

**Carrie and the curse of blood**

In Brian De Palma's Carrie (1976), based on a Stephen King novel from 1974, blood plays a central role. Carrie White (Sissy Spacek) is a troubled teenager: oppressed by her raving mad Christian mother Margaret White (Piper Laurie), despised and bullied by her classmates. At the start of the film, Carrie enjoys a shower after a less than successful volleyball match. In a lengthy, slow motion tracking shot, accompanied by saccharine violins, the camera invites the viewer to savour the images of the naked young girls [see DVD excerpt]. As the camera seeks out Carrie behind a wall of vapour, a cheesy flute sets in, further adding to the shameless soft porn ambience. Underneath a shower nozzle, with a less than subtle penis shape, Carrie washes with languid movements. The whole scene reeks of sultry voyeurism. This, however, is brutally interrupted when blood starts running down Carrie's thigh. The music stops, so does the slow motion, as Carrie, panic stricken, starts to scream; she does not realise that she is having her first menstruation. Barbara Creed compares the scene to Psycho:

When Carrie first bleeds, she is in the shower pleasurably massaging and stroking her body. Like Marion in Psycho, Carrie is shown enjoying her own body; the mood is sensual, even erotic. […] Like Marion, Carrie is also cruelly punished for enjoying solitary, sensual pleasures. (Creed, 1993:79)
According to Creed's master plan, more or less any horror film that depicts or somehow deals with female sexuality is a reminder of a patriarchal tradition that defines woman as 'abject'. Carrie's first menstruation is proof that she is now capable of sexual reproduction, thus she achieves the status of being both dangerous and 'monstrous': "The representation of Carrie as witch and menstrual monster has been largely ignored", claims Creed (Creed, 1993:78).

Maaret Koskinen, however, warns against too literal interpretations of the film's thematic aspects, encouraging us to take a closer look at its stylistic qualities. In this light, the 'punishment' of the shower scene gains a completely different meaning:

It is tempting to see the scene as an example of the pattern that has characterised many thrillers and horror films since Hitchcock's shower murder: the desire to "punish" female sexuality. However, the question is, if it is as simple as that. [...] The viewer is, via a very consciously applied soft-pornographic style, lured into a voyeuristic relation to Carrie's naked body – only to be abruptly woken up in the next instance when the blood sets in, tearing the illusory dream-images apart. It is not Carrie's desire that is being punished, but the viewer's – the desire of the gaze! (Koskinen, 1985:68-69, my translation)

In Koskinen's interpretation, 'patriarchal order' is mocked rather than reassured: stripped of its confident conviction that the female body is an ever-indulgent object of visual desire.

When Carrie hysterically appeals to the other girls for help, they respond by laughing and throwing sanitary towels and tampons at her. Returning home, Carrie confronts her mother with her lack of sexual education, only to be met by a torrent of biblical gibberish. Had she not 'tempted the Antichrist' she would not have received the 'curse of blood'.

The idea of menstruation as a curse is known from many different cultures and religions; seen as a source of pollution, menstruating women have been isolated and avoided during what was regarded as a 'dangerous' period. In the Old Testament whole passages are devoted to the rules applying to menstruating women. The

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43 See Douglas, 1992:150;175.
44 Leviticus 15:19-30 deals with sexual taboos and how to regard bodily discharges, including menstrual blood.
religious practices surrounding menstruation were described in Mary Douglas' *Purity and Danger*, which inspired Julia Kristeva to define menstrual blood as a primary source of abjection.

An important incident is linked to Carries first period: the initial hint of her paranormal powers. When her gym teacher attempts to calm her down in the shower, a light bulb pops with an exploding sound (as well as an eerie violin sound effect). We are to understand that this is the first outburst of Carrie's telekinetic powers. Barbara Creed reads the simultaneous emergence of womanhood and paranormal powers as further proof that Carrie is in fact a product of a patriarchal nightmare: "Woman's blood is thus linked to the possession of supernatural powers, powers which historically and mythologically have been associated with the representation of woman as witch" (Creed, 1993:79).

Later in the film, when Carrie has been tricked into participating in the high school prom, even voted Prom Queen by foul play, the second major occurrence of blood appears in the film: a group of her malicious classmates have made the setup in order to drench her in a bucket full of pig blood. Standing on the stage, humiliated and covered in the blood, Carrie unleashes her suppressed range once and for all, killing everyone present in a telekinetic inferno of fire and water.

Barbara Creed compares the film's bloody scenes, claiming that the menstrual blood in the beginning is an actual parallel to the pig's blood in the end: "Part of the problem with *Carrie* is that it plays on the debased meaning of woman's/pig's blood in order to horrify modern audiences; in so doing it also perpetuates negative views about women and menstruation" (Creed 1993:80).

Maaret Koskinen also compares the two scenes, reaching, however, a very different conclusion. Emphasising the camera work, she points to the fact that the viewer is invited to sympathise with Carrie, not condemn her:

The camera perspective changes to point of view, and through Carrie's eyes we see how everybody applauds. […] Once more, the viewer is encouraged to identify with Carrie, which happens for a definite reason. Because, when disaster strikes, when the bucket pours its blood over her and tears her dream of happiness apart […] it also hits the viewer. Exactly like in the
shower scene, the viewer's desire for "filmic happiness" is punished.  
(Koskinen, 1985:75, my translation)

As opposed to Creed's interpretation, Koskinen does not see Carrie's newfound womanhood as her problem, but rather that society will not allow her to become a woman. Her mother's obstinate denial of her sexual development, as well as her classmates' puerile conduct, is an attempt to stop her from growing up: the pig blood is "pasted around her face and hair so she appears naked and bald – as if she were a newborn baby" (Koskinen, 1985:75, my translation).

After the fatal prom, Carrie walks home like as a sleepwalker, undresses and washes the blood off in the bathtub [see DVD excerpt]. The scene is not shocking; yet, the images of the blood-coloured water invoke a sense of horror. According to Barbara Creed, Carrie's bath is a purification of the blood curse: a return to a pre-sexual state in accordance with 'patriarchal' wishes; whilst the bath in Koskinen's interpretation symbolises resignation: a silent capitulation to the fact that society is not ready to accept her as woman.

Creed and Koskinen represent contradictory understandings of the film's attitude towards female sexuality. The scene after Carrie's bath seems to support Koskinen's claim that the film's attitude is not hostile; it overtly ridicules the hypocritical mother as she 'confesses' how Carrie was conceived through lustful 'sin' ("And I liked it! I liked it!" she shouts). In Margaret's twisted mind Carrie must die, because she was conceived in sin, so she stabs her daughter in the back with a knife. Carrie manages to drag herself to the kitchen where she kills her mother in self-defence with a telekinetic hailstorm of kitchen utensils. As Margaret exhales with bestial orgasmic sounds, hanging in the doorway like a crucified Jesus, she becomes a monument over the fake and hypocritical religion she has oppressed herself and her daughter with. Her death by kitchen utensils implies that her end is linked to her own obsolete notions of 'appropriate' female properties, and her mad confessions and ridiculous end tell us that her views on female sexuality do not in any way resemble the film's views.
Koskinen acknowledges that "it is no surprise that the film has often been interpreted as a symptom of fear of, and contempt for, women" (Koskinen, 1985:64, my translation). She stresses, however, that a close examination of the film's style reveals its moral stance: a critique of the way female sexuality is either objectified (as demonstrated through the 'awakening' of the shower scene) or repressed by a puritan (American) society.

As a representative and figure of identification for troubled teens, Carrie's 'sin' is an invention of a society that lacks acceptance and understanding. Many teen girls could recognise themselves in Carrie – or even identify with her devastating anger and vengefulness. Stephen King, a highly moralist author, writes about his novel: "In Carrie's destruction of the gym [...] we see a dream revolution of the socially downtrodden" (King, 1991:201).

Carrie's transformation from "Cinderella" to "monster" (Koskinen, 1985:74) is a tragic one, placing her alongside old fashioned monsters like Frankenstein's monster and King Kong:

The real monster is – just like in the old horror films – not the monster itself, but rather its surroundings. If, for example, Frankenstein's monster is the victim of man's scientific and technical civilisation, then Carrie is the victim of a ruthless, suffocating small town society where the worst thing that can happen to a young girl is not to be invited to the prom. The monster, in other words, is "normality": hell is the Others! (Koskinen, 1985:78, my translation)

As far as the 'curse' of blood goes, it is not the menstrual blood that is 'abject', but the pig's blood. The suggestion that the blood of an animal will inflict certain effects or cast certain characteristics on a person is rooted in primitive beliefs and, therefore, truly 'abject'. Although Carrie, at first sight, looks like a nightmare vision of female sexuality and empowerment, a closer look at the film's style and narrative reveals its moral potential; by sympathising with Carrie, the film is more tragic than sensational.
The Shining

Stanley Kubrick's *The Shining* (1980), based on a 1977 novel by Stephen King, is another example of a film that employs effects that bring Kristevian horrors to mind. These include the boy Danny's (Danny Lloyd) almost emblematic 'shining' visions of a flood of blood pouring out into a hallway, as well as his visions of the dismembered twin girls in the hallway.

Over the years, *The Shining* has turned into a veritable theoretical battlefield; the crossfire mainly being exchanged between those who read the film through psychoanalysis and those who read it through critique of ideology.

Among the supporters of the psychoanalytic reading is Robert Kilker who, in an essay with the unequivocal title "All Roads Lead to the Abject: the monstrous feminine and gender boundaries in Stanley Kubrick's *The Shining*", argues that the film may "make a monster out of the repressive patriarch, but it also codes the feminine as monstrous, and equally threatening as the patriarchal forces that would try to contain it" (Kilker, 2006:56).

*The Shining* has been widely criticised for its excessive 'arty' techniques: the steadicam\(^{45}\) that is used in the opening sequence when the family's car is followed from the air; when Danny goes on his frequent tricycle-rides through the long corridors of The Overlook Hotel, and when the characters walk in the topiary maze. However, according to Kilker, these long tracking shots serve a specific goal: to represent umbilical cords. Kilker interprets the long, winding road that leads the family through the mountains to the hotel in the opening sequence as a passage into nature: the realm of 'femininity'. If nature is the surrounding feminine principle and the hotel the actual female body, then the infamous room 237 must be the womb: the breeding site for female horrors. This room is a classical metaphor for repression; Danny has been told by the hotel's Head Chef Hallorann (Scatman Crothers) that he must under no circumstances enter the room, as it contains terrible secrets. One day, however, the door to the room is unlocked, and Danny's curiosity outweighs his fear:

\(^{45}\) A camera mount that ensures even and smooth movements, even when hand held or mounted on a dolly that moves over uneven surfaces.
Whenever Danny pedals his tricycle or walks down the long network of hallways, he encounters the monstrous feminine. It seems that if you follow the cord long enough, eventually you will arrive at the mother. Twice he approaches Room 237, and on his second trip he finds an unlocked door and then is attacked off-screen by the ulcerous woman. (Kilker, 2006:59)

We never follow Danny into the room, but when he returns he has strange marks on his neck, as if someone had tried to strangle him. In order to clear himself of suspicion for the boy's marks, his dad Jack (Jack Nicholson) decides to investigate the room, and one of film history's most infamous bathroom scenes is about to begin [see DVD excerpt].

The scene opens with a shot of the open door with a dangling key fob reading ROOM Nº 237. This shot is followed by one of the drooling, shaking Danny, apparently telepathically following Jack's quest through 'shining'. As the camera enters the room, representing Jack's point of view, a high-pitched synthesizer sound adds an unnerving ambience. At first sight the room appears anonymous and soulless; however, as the camera passes through the drawing room and bedroom, the synthesiser sound becomes deeper and gloomier, suggesting that something horrible is stirring. Only when the door to the bathroom is opened (still seen from Jack's point of view), a truly unsettling tableau is revealed: a bathtub, a drawn shower curtain, and the vague contour of a figure behind it. The intensification of suspense is enhanced through the editing as a reverse shot offers a medium close up of the anxious looking Jack. Via this transition from point of view camera to character identification we are made Jack's accomplices and. Thus, in the sequence of shots that follow, alternating between the shamelessly staring Jack and the naked woman getting out of the tub, we are revealed as his partners in crime, willingly joining in on his voyeuristic pleasure. The woman is further objectified by being placed in front of a recess that frames her like a piece of museum art. When Jack approaches her, she touches him and – almost taunting – puts her fingers on his throat as if to let him know that she can be dangerous and may have inflicted Danny's marks. The disturbing ambience is now accentuated by the background music of unidentifiable clattering, wind instruments, percussion sounds and, most disturbing of all, a recurrent high-pitched buzzing sound,
much like a mosquito. This sound suggests a threat: whatever lascivious joy the image of the naked woman may incites will be effectively eradicated with a sudden sting.

As Jack and the woman engage in a deep kiss, a cut to a close up leaves only Jack's face and the back of the woman's head visible. After a while, however, Jack looks up with an expression that soon changes from puzzled to terrified. The fact that we can only decode the events from Jack's facial expression underlines our situation as audience: we are left with Jack as our only figure of identification and source of knowledge, and thus our reaction is postponed. Only when the camera makes a 180 degree swish pan do we get to see things from Jack's perspective in the mirror: not the slender, young beauty he thought he kissed, but the backside of a bloated, decomposed hag. This is a truly Kristevian moment: even more so because the woman resides on the periphery of life and death – obviously dead, yet moving about:

A decaying body, lifeless, completely turned into dejection, blurred between the inanimate and the inorganic, a transitional swarming, inseparable lining of a human nature whose life is undistinguishable from the symbolic – the corpse represents fundamental pollution.

(Kristeva, 1982:109)

As Jack backs away from the hag, who now laughs loudly, six brief shots are cut in: three of the still 'shining' Danny, three of a third woman slowly ascending from the tub – this one old, mouldy and skinny. The woman ascending from the tub suggests the return of the repressed: the resurfacing of the secret and forbidden, which are concealed by the room.

The whole setup looks like a classic case for feminist-psychoanalytic film criticism: the fact that there are three different monstrous women in the bathroom may indicate that this is not about women but woman in general. Interestingly, the scene deviates from Stephen King's novel where it is the boy who has the close encounter with one woman in a bathtub. In Kubrick's film the scene becomes a sexualised meeting between two adults, thus adding to the suspicion that the film displays an attitude towards female sexuality. Jack's denial when he talks with his wife Wendy (Shelley Duvall) after the incident in room 237 ("Nothing at all. I didn't
see one God damn thing") merges with the 'return of the repressed' metaphor to indicate a complete lack of acknowledgement of the feminine. Furthermore, the image of the rotting embracing woman, together with the mixture of death and sex, evoke Lacan's ideas about the engulfing mother and Kristava's monstrous feminine.

In Kilker's psychoanalytic interpretation the film becomes a tale of Lacanian emancipation. The father, Jack, is not capable of taking action and ends up engulfed by the 'archaic mother' – even to the point of dying when he "allows himself to be immersed in the monstrous feminine topiary maze" (Kilker, 2006:61). His son Danny, on the other hand, breaks the umbilical cord and casts off the maternal engulfment to become the man his father is not. This happens ultimately when he refrains from using the 'feminine' (intuitive) 'shining' skill to escape his lunatic father, instead surviving "through his wits" (ibid.) by leaving misleading footprints in the snow.

Psychoanalytic readings of The Shining like Kilker's are contested especially by readings that interpret the film as critique of ideology. In one contemporary review, the woman in the bathroom was interpreted as the quintessential symbol – not of the 'monstrous feminine', but of the film's ideological implications:

As we will see, it becomes apparent that Jack is caretaker not only of the hotel but also of the American dream, depicted in the film as empty and haunted. This illusion is initially seductive but once embraced it shows itself rotting and destructive – like the mysterious woman in room 237. (Leibowitz/Jeffress, 1981:46)

In this reading the Hotel Overlook is a sad monument of the past. This is indicated visually by the flaunting of the American flag on the desk at Jack's interview with the hotel manager, Mr. Ullman (Barry Nelson), as well as through many hints at the affluent society: flashy hotel lounges, references to the visiting 'jet set' and the abundance of material goods such as food ("You folks could eat up here for a whole year and never have the same menu twice" says Hallorann to Wendy in the storage room). The Hotel Overlook's status as an allegory of American arrogance and ruthlessness is condensed in Ullman's completely indifferent tone when he says that
"the site is supposed to be located on an Indian burial ground, and I believe that they actually had to repel a few Indian attacks as they were building it".

Literary critic Frederic Jameson is known for his Marxist orientated interpretations of literature and film, and he refers to *The Shining* as a display of the "very triviality of daily life in late capitalism" (Jameson, 1981). Jameson downplays the impact of the film's paranormal incidents, claiming that they only act as void images to represent the abundance of empty signs that inhabit modern culture: "the illusion that things still happen, that events exist, that there are still stories to tell, in a situation in which the uniqueness and the irrevocability of private destinies and of individuality itself seem to have evaporated" (ibid.)

In this light, the opening sequence that Robert Kilker interprets as a trip along an umbilical cord into the realm of the monstrous feminine gets a completely different meaning:

Beauty and boredom: this is then the immediate sense of the monotonous and intolerable opening sequence of *The Shining*, and of the great aerial tracking shot across quintessentially breathtaking and picture-postcard "unspoiled" American natural landscape; as well as of the great hotel, whose old-time turn-of-the-century splendor is undermined by the more meretricious conception of "luxury" entertained by consumer society, and in particular by the manager's modern office space and the inevitable plastic coffee he has his secretary serve.
(Jameson, 1981)

Kilker disagrees, rhetorically asking:

If the director were more interested in presenting the alienation of capitalism, why not begin the film at the Overlook Hotel with Jack surrounded by images of wealth that he can never hope to attain? Instead of experiencing that possibility, we witness that Jack's failure to achieve the American dream is predetermined by the natural world itself, coded feminine not merely by our cultural associations of nature with the feminine, but by the winding umbilical cord-like road connecting eventually to the Overlook Hotel itself.
(Kilker, 2006:58)
Ultimately, there is not much to gain from attempting to guess the director's intentions; the feisty discussions of the film vividly demonstrate that it contains strong diverse interpretative potentials. One specific objection to Kilker's version, however, is more an objection against the feminist-psychoanalytic method in general: it presupposes certain 'givens', such as the conviction that nature should be perceived as feminine. In the case of *The Shining*, the rugged, snow covered mountains tend to defy the rigid definition of femininity that the feminist-psychoanalytic method ironically tends to confide in. Moreover, the understanding of the road as "umbilical cord-like" (ibid.) is a rather subjective interpretation that lacks convincing support.

As far as the bathroom scene goes, however, it confirms the gender-based genre clichés: even on this rare occasion when the man is supposedly the victim, it is still the woman who is naked and the object of voyeuristic desire.

**Voyeurism and violence**

In psychoanalytic film studies, Laura Mulvey's 1975 essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" is a highly influential text. Not only did it contribute to the definition of the Freudian-Lacanian framework; its fundamental ideas have maintained their influence, functioning as sources of inspiration and debate up to the present day (Leitch (ed.) 2001:2179-2180).

In short, Mulvey's essay deals with the representation of women in classical (Hollywood style) cinema, claiming that women in film have traditionally acted as objects for the male gaze. Whereas men on films are likely to be active, ambitious individuals that bring the narrative forward, women are more likely to be portrayed as passive, submissive creatures that slow the plot's pace down.\(^{46}\)

According to Mulvey, the crucial point is the differing ways that male and female characters look and are looked at: she defines the 'male gaze' as extrovert and active, and the 'female gaze' as introvert and passive. Exemplified with films by Josef von Sternberg and Alfred Hitchcock, Mulvey demonstrates how women are

\(^{46}\) Of course, these observations are in themselves nothing new: we need only think of Vladimir Propp's studies of folk and fairy tales and A.J. Greimas' actantial model to see how narratives, from the earliest times, have designated the male hero as the acting "subject" and the desirable female (typically the princess) as the passive "object".
objectified through various techniques. For example, women in classical cinema are often filmed in close ups, while men more often appear in medium and long shots. This technique results in the women being shown as 'cut up' into bits and pieces, appearing as separate body parts rather than intact human beings. The cut-up technique is effectively employed in the montage style of Psycho's bathroom scene, apparently to avoid showing specific body parts, yet paradoxically bringing them even closer to mind via their absence. Carol Clover suggests that the absent body parts might have been essential for the film's promotion:

A classic publicity poster for Psycho shows Janet Leigh with a slightly uncomprehending look on her face sitting on the bed, dressed in a bra and half-slip, looking backward in such a way as to outline her breasts. If it is the task of promotional materials to state in one image the essence of a film, those breasts are what Psycho is all about. (Clover, 1997:199)

Psycho was shockingly graphic for its time, not only in terms of violence, but also in terms of female sexuality and physiology. Not only did the film invite its audience to take delight in the spectacle; it made voyeurism a narrative theme in close connection with violence. Most obviously in the scene just before Norman Bates kills Marion where we watch him peeping at her through a hole in the motel wall, as she undresses. The close up of his eye condenses the essentials: he has plenty of desire but, unable (or unwilling) to act upon it, his anger and guilt take over and lead him (or rather, his 'mother') to kill Marion.

Male characters in classical film, writes Mulvey, have a double function; not only are they 'bearers of the look' within the diegesis of the fiction, they are also stand-ins for the desire of the (male) audience:

As the spectator identifies with the main male protagonist, he projects his look onto that of his like, his screen surrogate, so that the power of the male protagonist as he controls events coincides with the active power of the erotic look, both giving a satisfying sense of omnipotence. (Mulvey, 1975:2187)
The feeling of 'omnipotence' is essential to the male's pleasure in viewing women portrayed on film, as it is his only comfort in the interplay that is deeply rooted in infantile fears and desires. Mulvey states that there are two opposing phenomena at stake in male film viewers, both rooted in castration anxiety: one is related to the Lacanian 'mirror stage', the other to the Freudian term scopophilia (pleasure from looking).

The former relates back to the stage of psychosexual development at which the infant has a desire to see itself as a whole, but when mirroring itself in the mother is reminded of her 'lack' (that she does not have a penis). Terrified by this reminder of the 'castrating mother', male audiences 'split' their gaze between spectacle and narrative. Thus, the active male protagonist becomes the subject of narrative interest, while the female character, and the imminent threat she poses, is disarmed by assigning her with object status. The latter, scopophilia, can be explained as the act of transforming the 'castrating mother' into a fetish-object. In so doing, she ironically becomes a substitute for the missing phallus; in fact, a 'phallic woman'. Mulvey's psychoanalytic framework has been widely discussed by a vast number of film critics, many of whom are far from convinced. One such critic, Noël Carroll, refers to her theories as "epistemologically suspect" (Carroll, 1996:265) and writes with ill-concealed sarcasm:

A second option for dealing with male castration anxiety in the context of male scopophilia, Mulvey contends, is voyeurism. Apparently, for Mulvey, this succeeds by re-enacting the original supposed castration of the woman – though I must admit that I'm not completely clear on why re-enacting the original trauma would help in containing castration anxiety (is it like getting back on a horse after you've been thrown off of it?)

(Carroll, 1996:264)

Although Mulvey’s psychoanalytic framework is rather impermeable, it is nevertheless the text's main asset and the reason behind its continuous impact. As she was the first theorist to apply a coherent system of Freudian and Lacanian theories onto aspects of film viewing, Mulvey contributed significantly to a tradition that still thrives, with feminist film theorists such as Carol Clover, Linda Williams and Barbara
Creed highly influenced by her thoughts and ideas. Other self-identified feminists, however, accuse the psychoanalytic framework of being obscure and of reaffirming its own assumptions at the expense of the films studied. Cynthia Freeland, for instance, warns in harsh tones against the dangers of reductionism, calling Mulvey's ideas for a "straightjacket association between males and the pleasures of looking or spectatorship" (Bordwell/Carroll (ed.), 1996:196); and Sue Short holds it against Mulvey that she "crucially ignores potential female identification" (Short, 2006:48).

**Darkness and blindness**

According to Laura Mulvey the look is a powerful tool – a means to possess the desired object. She bases her ideas on classical cinema, where heroines were expected to act shyly, gaze downward and feel grateful for the attention they got from men. Linda Williams elaborates on Mulvey's ideas, writing about classical cinema:

> Like the female spectator, the female protagonist often fails to look, to return the gaze of the male who desires her. In the classical cinema, to see is to desire. It comes as no surprise, then, that many of the "good girl" heroines of the silent screen were often figuratively, or even literally, blind. Blindness in this context signifies a perfect absence of desire, allowing the look of the male protagonist to regard the woman at the requisite safe distance necessary to the voyeur's pleasure, with no danger that she will return that look and in so doing express desires of her own." (Williams, 1991:2)

One of the most famous examples of a blind heroine is from Charles Chaplin's *City Lights* (1931). In this film, a tramp (Chaplin) has a brief encounter with a blind flower seller (Virginia Cherrill). When he gives her change for a flower, the incidental slamming of the door of an exclusive car leads her to believe that he is rich. He falls in love with her, and when he learns that she and her grandmother are to be evicted from their home, he pulls out all the stops in order to come up with the money and pay their rent. A series of unfortunate events lead to his imprisonment, and when he is

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47 In *Visual and Other Pleasures* (1989) Mulvey revisited – and revised – her ideas from "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema". However, as the psychoanalytic framework remained relatively unchanged, the book may have elaborated on the original ideas, but it is not likely to have changed the minds of either supporters or opponents.
finally released the girl has had an operation and regained her eyesight. She does not recognise the tramp until she feels the palm of his hand. "You?" she exclaims, staring intensely into his eyes. "You can see now?" the tramp asks, and she replies: "Yes, I can see now."

Neither the film’s climax nor ending offer much support to Mulvey's and Williams' theories about the male and female gaze. The film may initially invite (male) viewers to identify with the tramp's voyeuristic fascination of the lovely girl who cannot look back at him, but this is merely because we sympathise, knowing that his chances of a romantic engagement are improbable due to his social status. The resolution actually occurs because she is able to look back at him and recognise him for who he is: poor, but pure at heart. He longs to be seen and, judging by the couple's affectionate handholding, no castration anxiety comes between them. Mulvey and Williams may have a case in their analysis of classical Hollywood cinema, but the servility of the female characters is not nearly as compulsory as they claim.

When it comes to filmic horrors, the look and act of seeing generally serve a far more down-to-earth purpose: Survival. In the earliest tales of terror, as well as in modern horror fiction, darkness plays an important role for the obvious reason that it is almost impossible to defend oneself against an unseen enemy. In old folk tales the dark forest was a dangerous place, and in Gothic literature the danger lurked in dark old castles and gloomy cellars. Modern horror has met the challenge of artificial light with recurrent images of hands that cunningly sabotage the electrical (and cut the telephone wire).

What must be even worse than groping in the dark when there is a killer on the loose, is to be completely blind and possibly the next intended victim. Such is the case for Helena Robertson (Uma Thurman) in Bruce Robinson's thriller *Jennifer Eight* (1992). A serial killer whose victims are all blind girls spreads fear in Eureka, California. Through an analysis of the killer's patterns and preferred victims, Sgt. John Berlin (Andy Garcia) predicts that the next likely victim (the so-called 'Jennifer Eight') is the blind cellist Helena. John's eagerness to protect her is not diminished by the fact that he falls in love with her. However, Helena refuses the 24-hour
surveillance offered to her. In the bathroom scene that follows, she realises that she should have accepted the offer [see DVD excerpt].

As Helena gets ready for her bath, she undresses at a languid pace, almost ritually; an idea enhanced by the slightly ominous background music, which suggests that she is unknowingly preparing for her own death. The scene invites us into the universe of the blind girl with lighting so dim that we can barely see what is going on, while the sounds are loud and clear: the splashing of water, the turning of handles, and particularly the beeping of what appears to be some sort of water level sensor (the enervating sound of which, as well as the close ups of the flashing red lamp, both clear visual alarm signals, further tells us that something horrific is about to happen). Then the first flash of light hits Helena's naked body and we soon realise that she is a victim of non-physical violation, photographed by an unseen voyeur. This brings to mind Susan Sontag’s views on photography:

To photograph people is to violate them, by seeing them as they never see themselves, by having knowledge of them they can never have; it turns people into objects that can be symbolically possessed. Just as the camera is a sublimation of the gun, to photograph someone is a sublimated murder – a soft murder, appropriate to a sad, frightened time. (Sontag, 1977:14-15)

Whereas the girls in Michael Powell's Peeping Tom were literally murdered with a built-in device in the camera, Helena is 'softly murdered' through photography; a premonition of the killer's intentions of literally murdering her and objectifying her by dumping her severed body parts around like trivial pieces of meat, as he has done to his earlier victims. When Helena realises she is not alone, she gets scared out of her wits; as she curls up on the floor, desperately fumbling in thin air. The humiliation is complete as she rests her head on the toilet; possibly a conscious allusion to Psycho's image of the dead Marion's head next to the toilet.

In the film's ending, Helena survives via a cunning scheme. She is apparently chased by the murderer, fluttering away like a confused moth. However, the blond woman is not Helena, but a decoy: Helena's friend Margie (Kathy Baker) wearing a wig. When the killer approaches her, the presumed blind girl resolutely turns around
and shoots him. This ending emphasises the film's overall theme of vision: the killer's misinterpretation of what he sees becomes fatal.

As it turns out, the killer is a man who grew up as the only seeing child in a children's home for the blind. His frustration over the blind girls that never noticed him has turned into an incontrollable rage in adulthood, leading him to avenge his misfortune with murder on random blind girls.

Even though there is nothing innovative about *Jennifer Eight*'s plot and style, it does not confirm the psychoanalytic idea of the male and female gaze. The film's explanation, should we take it seriously, of the reason behind the killer's psychopathic behaviour focuses on concrete childhood experiences, not on infantile trauma (castration anxiety). And the core of the matter is not that the woman looks – and thus expresses desire – but that she does not look and therefore becomes unattainable. The idea that popular cinema basically presents only two types of women, bad ones who gaze and good ones who do not, is neither a universal tool to understanding women in early classical Hollywood cinema, nor modern box office hits.

*Dressed to Kill*

Brian De Palma is known for his highly stylised works, especially in the thriller, horror and crime genres. He has often been criticised for putting aesthetics over matter, and for being so inspired by Hitchcock's films that it sometimes borders on plagiarism. De Palma's *Dressed to Kill* (1980) has some apparent similarities with *Psycho*: the film opens with a blonde woman being attacked in a shower, and the film's killer turns out to be a transsexual man with a very abnormal relationship to women. However, De Palma's unique audiovisual style deviates from Hitchcock's, making him a noticeable filmmaker in his own right. John Brent defends De Palma by concluding that "as derivative as some of these plot elements are, De Palma basically uses them as starting points, and the similarities are, in many ways, quite superficial" (McCarthy, 1994:148).

The theme that best describes *Dressed to Kill* is voyeurism. This is made clear from the film's very first scene, where a slow motion tracking shot brings us through a bathroom door, literally inviting us into a very private sphere: a man (Keith Gordon)
shaves in front of a mirror while his wife, Kate Miller (Angie Dickinson), showers with leisurely and unmistakably erotic movements, while lustfully looking at him [see DVD excerpt]. Pino Donaggio's synthesiser and violin music are nothing less than tacky, adding a sultry atmosphere to the alternating close ups of Kate's face and body (clearly a younger and firmer body double). The close ups divide her body into separate parts, resulting in a type of objectification that is more commonly found in pornographic depictions of women. As Kate's facial expression becomes increasingly ecstatic, the background music adds the sound of sighing women's voices, definitively pushing the ambience over the threshold to sultry. This atmosphere, however, is harshly and suddenly interrupted as someone grabs her from behind, holding her over the mouth and between the legs. The shocking impact is underlined with an enervating synthesiser tone. She screams and the picture dissolves in steam, leaving us to believe that she has been killed. However, the following shot shows her in bed with her husband, revealing the bathroom scene as nothing but a nightmare. But with a sound bridge that makes her scream continue in this shot, a parallel is drawn between the nightmarish assault and her husband's lovemaking. Kenneth MacKinnon interprets the sequence as a conscious stylistic comment on the voyeuristic nature of film watching:

Partly, the movie seduces us into ogling Angie Dickinson's nakedness and then 'punishes' us by casting doubt on the reality of what we have witnessed. We seem to be forced to 'place' or 'read' the shower sequence, which ends with a murderous attack on Kate, in order to make sense of the prosaic scene immediately after, of Kate submitting to her husband's perfunctory lovemaking. (MacKinnon, 1981:45)

Much like Koskinen did in the case of De Palma's *Carrie*, MacKinnon places the 'blame' on the audience, singling us out as the real perpetrators because we more than willingly take voyeuristic pleasure in the events presented on screen.

Carol Clover, on the other hand, insists that the terrific chain of events that ends with Kate's death is to be taken literally, as a punishment for Kate's sexual behaviour:
Brian De Palma's *Dressed to Kill* presents the infamous example of the sexually desperate wife, first seen masturbating in her morning shower during the credit sequence, who lets herself be picked up later that day in a museum by a man with whom she has sex first in a taxi and later in his apartment. On leaving his place in the evening, she is suddenly attacked and killed in the elevator. The cause-and-effect relationship between (illicit) sex and death could hardly be more clearly drawn. (Clover, 1987:200)

It is worth paying attention to Clover's choice of words, which indicate that she is either unable to escape the linguistic framework of the patriarchy she criticises, or scornfully imitates it: She uses the word "desperate" to describe a woman with an appetite for sex; and she describes how Kate "lets her self be picked up" as if she were a passive object, despite the fact that she very actively participates in the seduction phase.

If Clover's use of words is sarcastic, it expresses anger towards the film, an anger shared by many women: *Dressed to Kill* caused uproar when it was released, so fierce that it "provoked feminists to launch a nationally organized boycott" (Worland, 2007:142). The question is if the characters' conduct and destinies are evidence enough to judge the film's moral standpoint.

There are definitely indications that we are not to take the film's plot too seriously. As is the case with *Psycho*, *Dressed to Kill* has a highly dubious psychiatrist, Dr. Levy (David Margulies), who explains the murder and assesses the killer's profile when s/he is captured in the end. The killer, as we learn, was actually Kate's psychiatrist, Dr. Robert Elliott's (Michael Caine), acting as his female other 'Bobbi'. "He was a transvestite about to make the final step, but his male side wouldn't let him do it" explains Dr. Levy. Allegedly 'Bobbi' killed Kate because she aroused Dr. Elliott sexually, thus reminding him of his repressed male side.

Even if we are to take this psychological explanation for granted, it is never Kate's sexuality that is the problem, but Dr. Elliott's – that is, the *male* sexuality: 'Bobbi' wants to be a 'real' woman, which is why she is jealous of Kate. According to this logic, Kate is actually presented as a whole, desirable and enviable woman, *because* she is in touch with her sexuality. Another indication that the film is not hostile towards female sexuality is that the film's investigative heroine and final girl is
the prostitute Liz Blake (Nancy Allen). If the film's intention was to punish overt display of female sexuality, it seems a fairly odd choice to make the heroine a prostitute.

All these things aside, the overt audio-visual style and the narrative structure constantly push themselves to the fore, indicating that the film's 'message' – if there is any – should be found there, rather than in the gaudy plot and characters. After the doubtful psychiatric profiling of 'Bobbi', the film's ending reaffirms the sense of something altogether too laboured to be taken literally: 'Bobbi' manages to escape from the mental institution to which s/he has been committed. Dressed in a stolen nurse's uniform s/he breaks into Liz's house to take the final revenge [see DVD excerpt]. Armed with a razor knife s/he enters the bathroom where Liz is showering with evident pleasure – just as Kate did in the opening scene. In an extremely thrilling bathroom scene Liz is outsmarted by 'Bobbi' and ends up with her throat slit open. Everything happens in a strange dreamlike atmosphere, and it is the mirrors that eventually deceive Liz. She cannot trust her own eyes, and neither can we: just as was the case in the film's first bathroom scene, this one also turns out to be a nightmare. As Liz screams, she wakes up in her bed, shattered but unharmed. Kenneth MacKinnon compares the scene with a similar nightmare scene in De Palma's Carrie, where the sole survivor Sue (Amy Irving) visits Carrie's grave, only to be grabbed around the wrist by a hand that shockingly emerges from the soil: "The awakenings at the end of this movie and of Carrie are both, self-evidently, jokes at the expense of the audience. They are also a commentary on the expense of leaving a cinema, of waking from the substitute reality of the celluloid dream-world" (MacKinnon, 1981:46).

In Dressed to Kill, several factors indicate that, ultimately, this is a film about film; this includes the symmetric relationship between the nightmares of the beginning and ending that display the plot as tailor-made craftsmanship. The feminist protests over the film's allegedly hostile attitude towards women becomes secondary, and Brian De Palma's moral intent – if any – is of a completely different nature: "His moralism, impossible to sustain at the literal level of his characters' conduct, is deflected to an attitude towards the workings of film itself" (MacKinnon, 1981:46).
Like Marion Crane, Kate is our main figure of identification, leaving us in the same state of confusion when she dies prematurely as Marion's death did in *Psycho*. If Kate is being punished, it is not for her sexual behaviour but for her lapse of judgement and missing sense of reality; as such, she and the viewer have a lot in common. If we feel the need to judge Kate's conduct we should also judge ourselves for willingly participating in her romanticised dream world.

**Looking into the camera**

Whereas *Jennifer Eight* deals with unchallenged voyeurism – with an object that is not even theoretically capable of 'returning the gaze' – *Dressed to Kill* takes a more abstract approach, implying through its visual and narrative style that the film returns the audience's gaze, thus making us aware of our willing participation in the horrors depicted. A third way of confronting the audience's voyeurism can be that an actor literally looks 'at' the audience – a technique that according to media researcher Vibeke Pedersen makes film the ultimate voyeuristic art form:

In the cinema, the subject can observe the object unseen and unhindered, without the object being able to return the look because it is not present in the same time or space as the viewer. Thus, there is no reciprocity between object and viewer-subject as it is the case e.g. in the theatre. Therefore, film offers the ideal voyeuristic pleasure, further enhanced by the convention in classical film that prohibits the characters from looking into the camera.

(Pedersen, 1991:36, my translation)

That fictional characters are prohibited from looking into the camera is a truth with modifications. Marc Vernet explains that there are two very different types of look into the camera. The first type is a completely integrated part of the traditional film style and narrative (sometimes referred to as the classical Hollywood narrative). It works under the condition that the camera represents another character's point of view – hence, the gaze does not violate the film's diegesis. The second type of look into the camera is non-diegetic; that is, unjustified by the internal logic of the fictitious space. It is this type of look that can be used as a comment on audience spectatorship: "The look at the camera has a double effect: it foregrounds the enunciative instance of the
filmic text and attacks the spectator's voyeurism by putting the space of the film and the space of the movie theatre briefly in direct contact" (Vernet, 1989: 48). This type of look was used to the Brechtian theatre, where the audience was addressed directly by the actors in order to create *Verfremdung*; thus exposing the fiction as fictitious and putting a stop to uncritical audience empathy.48

The purpose was the same in Michael Haneke's infamous film *Funny Games* (1997), where the character Paul (Arno Frisch) not only talks to the viewer, but even grabs a remote control and rewind the film when the plot does not suit him. In *Funny Games*, *Verfremdung* is used to distance the film morally from its own depiction of horrific violence. It is hardly surprising that the intellectual and stylistically deliberate Haneke uses the technique, but it might be slightly more surprising that it is also used in Steve Miner's sensationalist slasher *Friday the 13th, Part 2* (1981), the successor to Sean S. Cunningham's blockbuster *Friday the 13th* (1980).49

In the film's prologue, Alice (Adrienne King) is home alone. She was the final girl of the first film, surviving by decapitating the killer, Mrs. Vorhees (Betsy Palmer). Alice has terrible nightmares about a horrific boy emerging from a lake; a boy, who, all too soon, will reveal himself as more than just a dream. The boy is Mrs. Vorhees' psychotic son Jason Vorhees, hell-bent on avenging his mother's death.50

The scene uses different stylistic devices to prepare us for Alice's untimely demise: the mise-en-scène is cluttered and obscured, creating a claustrophobic, almost coffin-like ambience, while stark low key lighting causes ominous shadows. The hand held camera performs what Noël Carroll calls "unassigned camera movement" (Carroll, 1990:155): moving and acting as if it represented some sort of unnoticed conscious being. In the slasher genre the technique is generally associated with the point of view of the killer; however, it does not make sense that Alice would not see that there was someone right behind her or in her face, so the insisting camera is rather a premonition of the killer's impending arrival.

48 Brecht used *Verfremdung* as a reaction against realism in theatre. Many earlier theatre traditions, however, routinely addressed the audience directly, e.g. Ancient Greek theatre with the chorus, and Shakespearian theatre with 'asides'.
49 A comprehensive analysis of the entire opening scene can be found in Skovhus, 2009.
50 Jason Vorhees became one of the slasher genre's 'super star' killers, appearing in numerous sequels and remakes – the most recent being from 2009 (dir. Marcus Nispel).
After having spoken with her mother on the phone, Alice goes to have a shower [see DVD excerpt]. The strangely conscious camera lingers outside her bedroom door as she undresses, showing only the pieces of clothing that land on her bed. When she goes to the bathroom wearing a bathrobe, the camera hesitatingly follows behind, eventually approaching the pale pink shower curtain. This camera movement, shot at eyesight level, is a reversal of Psycho’s setup: the viewer is on the outside of the shower curtain, identifying with the possible killer rather than with the intended victim. This means that when Alice pulls the shower curtain aside with a swift movement and looks directly into the camera, it is as if she looks at *us*, designating us as the real perpetrators. After all, we were the ones deciding to watch the film, and the horrific spectacle is there for us.

Eventually, Jason gains access to Alice's apartment and kills her with an awl through the brain; a murder method that might hint further at the audiences own 'brain work' – the cognitive complicity in creating the filmic horrors.

*Friday the 13th Part 2* slyly uses *Verfremdung* to let us know that even if it is nothing but a crude piece of exploitation it only works because there is a crude audience to watch and enjoy it. With Alice's look into the camera the tables are turned for a moment; the voyeur becomes the object of the gaze. Not, of course, the actress's gaze but the scrutinising and revealing gaze of the film.

**Psychoanalytic film theory and the missing patient**

Among the relevant questions one could ask about psychoanalytic theory and criticism is 'who is the patient?' As proposed earlier, it seems fundamentally futile to treat fictional characters as patients, given that their existences are limited to the screen time and space; they have no past or present and cannot engage in dialogue with an analyst.

A different approach might be to analyse films as testimonies of the directors' lives, assuming that certain biographical facts are reflected in their works. Thus, we might delve into Hitchcock's catholic background and intimidation at the hands of Jesuits at school, (Thomsen, 1990:15-21), claiming that these events are the main
source of his constant attraction to the themes of 'crime and punishment'.

However, there are quite a few apparent objections to such an approach: first of all, in order to do justice to a work of art it must be appreciated and assessed in its own right, rather than being 'translated' into a statement about its maker. Secondly, at the time Hitchcock made his films it was common for directors to be hired by a studio to make a certain number of films, which meant that directors were sometimes obliged to make films they had no interest in making. Not even celebrated auteurs such as Hitchcock managed to completely avoid such situations.

Moreover, films are not only the works of the directors, but of numerous people with differing functions. Thirdly, even if we were to ask the director to confirm our assumptions, how would we know that he or she did not lie?

Another possible approach to film from a psychoanalytic angle is to focus on the audience as the actual 'case study'. As opposed to analysing fictional characters or filmmakers, this has the advantage that there is actually a possibility of a genuine dialogue: the 'therapist' (psychoanalytic film theorist) can ask the audience about their experiences. However, as psychoanalytic theory seems mostly interested in reaffirming what it already 'knows' about the human psyche, its reception studies are not likely to seriously consider the variety in audience and response. Andrew Tudor writes: "Psychoanalytic models, arguably already excessively reductive, will be particularly misleading, conceptually inclined to neglect the variability of audience responses in the name of spurious generality" (Jankovich, 2002:49).

Robin Wood suggests that we see films as a sort of collective subconscious that involves both filmmakers and audience:

Popular films, then, respond to interpretation as at once the personal dreams of their makers and the collective dreams of their audiences, the fusion made possible by the shared structures of a

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51 In an interview with François Truffaut, Hitchcock explained his fascination with crime through an anecdote that balances on the verge of the comical: "I must have been four or five years old. My father sent me to the police station with a note. The chief of police read it and locked me in a cell for five or ten minutes, saying, 'This is what we do to naughty boys"' (Truffaut, 1985:25).

52 Topaz (1969) is infamous for a production phase that was so problematic that Hitchcock eventually lost all interest in the film, to the point where he did not even care which of the two alternative endings the production company, Universal Pictures, chose. (Thomsen, 1990:254-256)
common ideology. It becomes easy, if this is granted, to offer a simple definition of horror films: they are our collective nightmares. (Wood, 1986:78)

Seductive as it may be, this idea suffers from the same flaws as all the aforementioned psychoanalytic approaches to film. It requires us to agree that there is in fact such a thing as collective nightmares and, furthermore, that these reaffirm the method's underlying concepts and linguistics: the Freudian and Lacanian personality models and theories of psycho-sexual development; repressed infantile fears and desires, etc.

In the end, arguing against psychoanalytic theory's pre-eminence in interpreting horror film (as well as art and life in general) is a bit like being subjected to 'trial by drowning'. You can either agree that horror conceals deeply rooted structures of infantile complexes, and that these structures contain the real meaning or message of the films, or you can disagree. The latter can only be the case if you yourself are so deeply entangled in infantile complexes and desires that you are not yet ready to recognise the truth. Float or drown; you cannot argue against psychoanalytic theory.
CONCLUSION
Throughout this thesis I have focussed on the feminist-psychoanalytic approach to the representation of women in film. I chose to do this with an emphasis on horrific bathroom scenes because they encompass essential traits that invite psychoanalytic interpretation: voyeurism, violence, male perpetrators and female victims. In my discussion of the feminist-psychoanalytic theoretical framework I have taken a critical stance, both towards the psychoanalytic method itself and towards the widespread assumption that the horror genre is misogynistic. My critique, however, must not be read as hostility against feminism or women's liberation in general. On the contrary, I am concerned that psychoanalytically based feminism is at risk of undermining its own case by focussing too one-sidedly on males and patriarchy; thus involuntarily reaffirming the traditional idea of females as marginalised, and reaffirming the 'us and them' terminology that patriarchy is accused of having instigated. The idea of the female 'other' implicitly nurtures the myth that the male sex is primary, and females the marginalised outcasts of society. Feminism that implicitly reaffirms the idea of women as victims does not benefit the feminist cause: hence, Carol Clover's claim that the tough final girl is only tough because she is not really a girl seems rooted in the patriarchal monopoly of defining gender traits and qualities.

Having said that, there is no denying that the horror genre has a perverse relationship to the depiction of women. However, as I have discussed, female victims are not an invention of modern horror; they were abundant in the Gothic novel and can be traced all the way back to ancient myths and folklore. Modern horror film is not controversial because of female victims, but because of the way they are selected and handled: since Psycho there has been a tradition for linking female displays of sexuality with subsequent violence, most notably in the slasher sub-genre; and the shower scene instigated a persistent trend of detailed depictions of women being mutilated and murdered.

Whereas women make up the majority of victims in modern horror film, the monsters are most likely to be men. But the occasional female monster also gives rise to critique for being anti-woman, because her monstrosity is often linked to sexuality: Carrie, for instance, discovers her paranormal powers simultaneously with her first period, and the horrific hag in The Shining is initially a seductive, naked young
woman. Based on the assumption that female victims are being punished for their sexuality, and female monsters are sexually impure, the horror genre has developed a reputation for being misogynistic. Barbara Creed's book *The Monstrous-Feminine – Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis* is based on the core concept that films create horror through representing the feminine as monstrous. However, I find it difficult to imagine how the feminist cause is helped by works that describe women as polluting, engulfing and monstrous; and the fact that these labels are presented as results of male anxiety and domination seems an even stronger reason to overthrow them.

I have engaged with psychoanalytic theories in the hope of illustrating and illuminating them. Simultaneously, I have seized the opportunity to discuss and criticise the psychoanalytic method and its relevance to horror film studies. It has been a major objection that the method, in its search for 'secret' messages and Freudian slips, tends to be overly attentive to plot and character analyses, thus overlooking the crucial importance of audio-visual style. Filmic style is often used to modify or even undermine the apparent statements of the plot, adding irony or humour to scenes, or creating unexpected empathy. This is very much the case in the examples from Brian De Palma's films *Carrie* and *Dressed to Kill*. On the surface, these films portray their female protagonists as respectively sexually monstrous and depraved. However, the audio-visual style contradicts this impression, which is why the women's misfortunes are tragic, not triumphant: the real monster proves to be the viewer, hoping to enjoy voyeuristic pleasures without consequences. Thriller and horror films are seldom as stupid as they may look, and if they present us with psychoanalytic inventory it is likely to be part of their sensational spectacle. Even in terms of spectatorship, a field in which the psychoanalytic method could benefit from empirical dialogue, it rather relies on 'given' assumptions of human nature. What seems to be lacking in psychoanalytic film theory is the ability to see that film is not just about discovering hidden content, but just as much about what we can immediately experience: images and sound, and our reactions to them. For a long

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53 Also of note is William Friedkin's *The Exorcist* (1973), in which the twelve-year-old Regan is possessed by a demon. Disgust and horror is evoked with foul sexually charged language and behaviour: the scene in which she masturbates with a cross, yelling 'fuck me, fuck me’, is instrumental in defining her as monstrous.
period, psychoanalytic theory has dominated horror; it is time for aesthetic theory to reclaim lost ground.

Horror film and experience of it encompass primary aspects of aesthetics: taste (preferably bad), and emotive/physical response. As such, the term 'tits and scream' that has been used as an alternative to the term slasher hits the spot precisely. The female victims please the eye, and their violent deaths call for emotive and physical response. After Psycho, the horror genre has preferred naked female victims, and the best way to justify their nudity is to have them showering or engaging in sex. Thus, the genre's display of women in beds or showers is a practical measure to ensure the audience's pleasure, far more than a moral attitude towards female sexuality. And, quite frankly, if it were horror film's mission to portray women as monstrous, then why do the victims tend to be young and pretty, with impeccable physiques? Bathroom scenes are erotica, justified by the overshadowing violence and gore. This combination makes them ideal aesthetic encounters; bordering between pleasure and pain.

The understanding of the horrific in art as a combination of pleasure and pain, of course, is nothing new. It is closely linked to the idea of the sublime that heavily influenced the Romantic Era. Edmund Burke pre-empted the poetics of the romantic period when he wrote *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757), presenting his views on the sublime in art and literature: "When danger or pain press too nearly, they are incapable of giving any delight, and are simply terrible; but at certain distances, and with certain modifications, they may be, and they are delightful" (Leitch (ed.), 2001:549-550). Burke's work also seems to envisage the basic mechanisms of modern horror that were founded in the Gothic novel54 and developed throughout the romantic period.

In the romanticist attitude towards art, we find, in my opinion, the key to understanding horror film. Romanticism celebrated the spectacular, grotesque, colourful and sublime; not as a thin layer of varnish covering a core of condensed meaning, but as a gateway to enjoying, and engaging in, art with unfiltered enthusiasm. Gothic tales and novels were ordinary people's access to earth-shattering...
events and body-shivering response. The romantic idea of horror in art slowly
decreased throughout the nineteenth century; however, it was psychoanalysis that
cause the final deathblow with Freud's interpretation of Hoffmann's "Der
Sandmann". The rise of psychoanalytic art theory reduced the attentiveness to the
aesthetics and effects of art; art works were no longer regarded as something in their
own right, but as instruments to illustrate and support psychoanalytic theories.
Interpretation was superior, art the humble tool.

Psychoanalytic film theory adopted this attitude, and as feminism took interest
in horror film, the dam was breached. Horror film was flooded with symbolic
interpretations: suddenly, a knife was no longer a knife, a wound no longer a wound,
and a naked woman was either a mother fetish or the target of universal male rage.
Psychoanalytic interpretations utilise thematic analyses to reaffirm theories of human
psychosexual development in infancy. This narrow focus is even more reductive
because the thematic readings tend to overlook the importance of filmic style and
aesthetics. In psychoanalytic theory's encounter with horror, the tub is already
halfway filled with meaning, before the tap is even turned; and when bloody horror
pours out, it is only allowed to float neatly on the surface of the profound depths of
psychoanalysis. There is an immediate need for the water to be stirred. The aesthetics
of horror are anything but superficial: they are essential.

55 Freud was heavily influenced by Ernst Jentsch's essay "On the psychology of the Uncanny" (1906).
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SUMMARY

Horrific bathroom scenes have been a staple of horror film since Marion Crane, in Hitchcock’s *Psycho*, undressed and exposed herself to what would become a one way psychoanalytic and feminist discourse. With *Psycho* as a *Leitmoif*, this study involves an analysis of the role of gender in horrific bathroom scenes. It looks at why, for example, the genre seems to like its women naked, wet and dead and its men dressed, dry and murderous; and why, in an attempt to criticise this apparent gender bias, some feminist theorists drown themselves in patriarchal linguistics to get their point across.

In the introduction, Marion's sad end becomes the beginning of an investigation of the history of the horror genre and the development of its horrific bathroom scenes, including the significance of bathing and showering in Western culture, and the symbolism of water.

Part I outlines the general landscape of horror through a brief history of horror film, with an emphasis on the socio-political connotations of the genre. It continues with a section on genre specific traits and the aims and possible morals of horror, which leads to introductory discussions of horror's tradition for female victims.

In Part II, the spotlight is put on the role of feminist-psychoanalytic theory in analysing horrific bathroom scenes. This begins with an introduction of the main theoretical framework and some of the core concepts it relies on. What becomes apparent in this process is that the aesthetics of horror, and in particular horrific bathroom scenes, have been neglected at the expense of theory itself, which, ultimately, overlooks the fact that horror film is a form of art more self-aware than these schools of thought can, or are willing, to give it credit for.

In an attempt to reclaim the aesthetics of horror, the conclusion dives back in time to the eighteenth century, recalling a period in which horror in art and literature were recognised for their unfiltered aesthetic potentials. Only when we take these ideas into account can we return to the essence of horror and revel in the horrific, claiming our right to be bathroom voyeurs or simply admirers of the (naked) aesthetics of the human form in all its (horrific) splendour.